

Testimony in Support of LD 1529, "An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-Value Natural Resources Statewide"

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Johnson. I am a resident of Oakland here to testify as a proponent of all sections in LD 1529, and to speak specifically to Section 5 in the legislation that directs the Land Use Planning Commission to reassign currently undeveloped, high-value lakes in Management Class 7.

I spent my entire career as a fishery biologist in IF&W's Moosehead Lake region, a region that includes 114 unorganized townships and plantations. Early in my career I identified ponds in the region's unorganized areas that could still be considered remote and had to justify their inclusion for zoning to protect their coldwater fisheries, especially brook trout, and the special recreational opportunities they provided. In the 1980's I participated in the Maine Wildland Lakes Assessment by reviewing and rating fisheries in and the environmental characteristics of the lakes and ponds in the region's unorganized areas. LURC's remote pond zoning and its assignment of lakes to management classes based on the Wildlands Lake Assessment are among some of Maine's finest conservation initiatives.

It has been 35 years since the lake classification and management program was adopted, and times have changed as well as conditions in the unorganized areas. Some ponds now included in Management Class 7 had not been surveyed but have been since 1990. However, most noteworthy for fisheries since 1990 is the finding that Maine is the only state in the eastern United States with extensive intact native, wild brook trout populations in its lakes and ponds. These native wild brook trout populations are our natural heritage and certainly qualify among the State's high-value natural resources. Most are found in the unorganized townships.

Therefore, this is a good time to review the Management Class 7 lakes in LUPC's jurisdiction. I will encourage LUPC as a part of that undertaking to revisit the resource ratings for each of the lakes and ponds in Management Class 7 to determine if information obtained since 1990 will change some of the ratings based on today's knowledge. Some ponds with fisheries rated as Significant back in the early 1980's have native wild brook trout populations that by today's standards Outstanding fisheries.

LD 1529 includes a logical approach toward conserving late-successional and old-growth forests and increasing protection on high value lakes in the unorganized areas. I respectfully urge you to recommend its passage to the full body of Maine Legislature.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak before this committee. I welcome any questions you may have.