

Testimony on LD 1529

An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide

By Jody Jones

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Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Jody Jones, I live in Arrowsic, and I am here today to testify in support of LD 1529.

I come before you today with a deep understanding and appreciation for the incredible lake resource here in Maine; one you have the opportunity to safeguard with this bill. Early in my career, I worked for the Natural Areas Program at the State Planning Office and was a principal participant in the 1987 Wildland Lakes Assessment. This study serves as the foundation for the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC)'s Lake Management Program, which is addressed in one portion of the bill before you here today.

My role in that study was to evaluate the scenic and shoreline character of all 1,500+ lakes in the unorganized parts of Maine. These were two of the seven resource categories evaluated as part of that effort, with the others being fish, wildlife, botanic features, cultural and historic features, and physical features. Each lake was given a rating of "outstanding," "significant," or left blank for each category, with "outstanding" meaning "clearly of Statewide importance due to unique or otherwise noteworthy characteristics" and "significant" meaning "met a predetermined minimum standard of significance."

Doing this for well over a thousand lakes was no small feat and required hundreds of hours of desktop compilation and analysis followed by field work. I personally visited over 300 lakes via seaplane as part of this work. From Deboullie Pond in Aroostook County to Kezar Lake near Lovell and everywhere in between, I spent months traveling across this incredible landscape characterizing just how special each one of these lakes is. To this day, it was the best job I ever had.

The information I collected was carefully reviewed by experts within the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW), the Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC), and the State Planning Office, and ultimately helped inform the process by which LURC managed these lakes. Through this process, 204 lakes were given the highest level of protection under the categories of remote ponds (Management Class 6) and high value, least accessible, and undeveloped lakes (Management Class 1). Many more lakes than this, however, should have received this degree of protection but were left off the list.

LD 1529 aims to correct the dataset by placing the remaining undeveloped, high value lakes that have resources of statewide significance to this list of 200. We have undoubtedly lost quite a few

of these undeveloped lakes over the years as camps have popped up, but the few that remain are worthy of enhanced protection.

I am a freshwater girl. Having grown up on the shores of Lake Michigan, and only moved to Maine in 1983, I can say my work on the lakes assessment opened my eyes to just how rare and special the freshwater lakes are here in Maine. Together they are their own “Great Lake” but remote and filled with fish you can eat without worrying about forever chemicals like PFAS. Our lakes and ponds are as close to true wilderness as you’ll see anywhere in the Eastern US and are worthy of our best possible stewardship.

You have the chance to do just that by awarding this stewardship to the remaining undeveloped, high value lakes and ponds in Maine that are unprotected. I urge you to pass this legislation. Thank you for your time and careful consideration.