



Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

April 24, 2025

RE: LD 1661, An Act to Establish a Comprehensive and Interagency Approach to Invasive Species Management

Dear Sen. Talbot Ross, Rep. Pluecker, and Members of the ACF Committee:

My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon’s Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1661, *An Act to Establish a Comprehensive and Interagency Approach to Invasive Species Management*.

According to the Maine Natural Areas Program, roughly one-third of the ~2,100 plant species recorded in Maine are not native species. While only some non-native species are invasive, their potential to harm economic, environmental, or human health is great – *and growing*. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Maine Climate Council recently reported that warming is expected to facilitate the establishment and spread of more invasive species in the Northeast. Additionally, as our population grows, wild landscapes are increasingly replaced with suburban backyards and grass lawns punctuated with non-native perennials and shrubs that support very few species of wildlife. In fact, the United States has planted more than 65,000 square miles—some 40 million acres—of lawn. These invaders compete with and displace native species, disrupting natural ecosystems. Unfortunately, once established, they are difficult and costly to remove, with eradication efforts that are often not always effective.

Invasive flora and fauna are invading Maine’s lakes and rivers too. Maine’s inland waters—and the fish, wildlife, and recreation they sustain—face ongoing threats from aquatic invasive species. Invasive fish and plant species—including milfoils, Curly-leaf pondweed, Parrot Feather, European naiad, and others—accidentally introduced to Maine waters disrupt habitat, displace native wildlife, harm quality, and reduce fishing and recreational opportunities, among other impacts. State agencies and hundreds of volunteers across the state work tirelessly to stop the spread, but they need more help. The introduction of these species can permanently alter our natural landscapes and the ways we enjoy

them. Our coastal waters are not immune either. Non-native species in the Gulf of Maine, such as Green Crabs, disrupt local economies and native species' ecosystems as well.

Maine Audubon is actively engaged in work to combat the negative impacts of invasive plants, fish, and wildlife in Maine. For example, over the last several years, we have been expanding programming around the critical value of wildlife-friendly plants to our state. At its heart, our "Bringing Nature Home Program" is about restoring and rebuilding Maine's natural biodiversity by planting the native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees that support the widest array of wildlife. Even a modest increase in the native plant cover on suburban properties greatly increases the diversity of insects, birds, and other animals that use the landscape. Through this initiative, Maine Audubon has worked with preschool children and their families to learn about pollinators and plant milkweed at our Gilsland Farm headquarters; we have taught students at elementary schools in Portland to propagate seeds, and about insects and their relationship to plants and birds; we have led middle school students on projects investigating Maine birds' food webs and redesigning the landscaping at their school. Dozens of adults have participated in our native plant walks and seed sowing workshops, and we have met hundreds more through our outreach to garden clubs and nurseries. Additionally, we created a "Native Plant Finder" which is an online tool designed to help people find the Maine native plants best suited for specific sites, that provide the greatest ecological function and benefit, and will complement their landscape design. We are also working closely with several land trusts, city officials, and retirement communities to engage their constituents in restoring and monitoring native plants and habitat.

We support LD 1661 as it would establish the Maine Invasive Species Advisory Council and the Comprehensive Invasive Species Management Office to evaluate and prioritize invasive species management across all taxa and coordinate interagency collaboration to accomplish invasive species prevention, management, education and outreach. This kind of coordination is critical to adequately addressing invasive species in our state. As native plants are critical to Maine's landscape in that they provide ecological services that non-native plants do not, we appreciate that one of the council's charges is to collaborate on the restoration of native species and habitat conditions in concert with addressing invasive species impacts.

We encourage the Committee to support LD 1661. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy