



Testimony in Support of LD 2141, An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program

Before the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

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Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Staff Scientist at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 20,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2141, An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program.

In Maine, lakes and farmland are core to our state's identity and wellbeing. Both play key roles in supporting the health of our communities, environment, and rural economies.

For lakes, in addition to supporting wildlife and the environment at large, clean water also benefits Mainers directly in several tangible ways. These include supplying high-quality drinking water for nearly half of Maine's 100 water districts, facilitating little-to-no-cost recreational opportunities utilized by 77% of Maine residents, and supporting key functions of local government like emergency services and public education through the property taxes of high-value lakefront areas in rural communities. These benefits, among others, add up to a net economic value for lakes in Maine of more than \$14 billion.¹

For farms, ensuring that working agricultural lands remain productive helps curb the impacts of urban sprawl, sustain local food systems, and achieve our state's climate goals. Maine's Climate Action Plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, calls for the conservation of 30% of the state's natural and working lands and the sourcing of 30% of the state's food locally by 2030. Currently, Maine's agriculture industry generates \$3.6 billion and supports 27,000 jobs annually across more than 7,600 farms, 96% of which are family owned.² Protecting farmland is a good investment for Maine's economy, local communities, and the future.

Despite the outsized roles that lakes and farmland have in Maine, conservation of these resources is chronically underfunded in the face of a growing list of threats and pressures. Sprawling development, increased soil erosion, and climate change all pose serious challenges for both lakes and farms alike and are expected to get worse in the future. But you don't have to take my

¹ <https://www.lakes.me/valuing-lakes>

² https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/mainegov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWW_2024_Book_112124.pdf

word for it—the facts speak for themselves. From 2017 to 2022, Maine lost more than 500 farms and 82,000 acres of farmland.³ According to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), there are 31 lakes listed as impaired under the Clean Water Act and 123 lakes listed as at risk of harmful algal blooms.^{4,5} Additionally, of the 413 lakes with sufficient data in DEP's newly available lake scorecards,⁶ 122 (30%) are experiencing statistically significant reductions in water quality.

Solutions to these challenges exist, but they require additional resources. The \$2 million in this bill for both lake restoration and farmland protection would be a gamechanger in these efforts. Maine is home to a vast network of local land trusts and conservation organizations that are ready to help farmers protect their land when additional funding becomes available. For lakes, these funds would help fill the many gaps that currently exist in Maine's water quality funding landscape. Some examples include bolstering DEP's modest lake monitoring budget so that it can collect information on the many lakes with little-to-no data, financing septic system replacement projects that are currently ineligible for federal funding, and implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) as an early intervention strategy for lakes that have degrading water quality but are not yet impaired.

As you consider this legislation that would redirect a portion of the unclaimed bottle deposits paid by Mainers toward lake and farmland protection, I urge you to keep three things in mind:

First, that Maine's lakes are the envy of New England—with an overall water quality not seen elsewhere east of the Rockies—but the quality of these lakes is declining and will continue to do so absent increased efforts to address pollutants.

Second, development pressures will continue to eat away at farmland in Maine without further resources for conservation easements and other strategies to allow farmers to continue farming their land; and

Finally, the unclaimed deposits that are the revenue source for this bill are monies that have been paid by Maine people. Investing those funds in these two areas that are core to Maine's character, economy, and quality of life is not just a worthy and timely legislative action; doing so will benefit generations to come. For these reasons, we strongly encourage the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2141.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

³ <https://extension.umaine.edu/2024/03/22/us-census-of-ag-reveals-increase-in-value-maine-farms-and-ag-products/>

⁴ https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/monitoring/305b/2024/2024_ME_IntegratedRpt-REPORT-DRAFT.pdf

⁵ <https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/lakes/bloomrisk.html>

⁶ <https://www.mainepublic.org/environment-and-outdoors/2025-12-14/maine-rolls-out-scorecards-for-lake-health>