

COBOSSEE WATERSHED DISTRICT

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Maine's first regional lake management district



Zooplankton

COBOSSEE WATERSHED DISTRICT 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, the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program and Public Defender Office Staffing**

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Wendy Dennis. I am a resident of the Town of Winthrop. I am a limnologist testifying in **SUPPORT** of LD 2141 on behalf of the Cobossee Watershed District (CWD), a special-purpose district authorized by the Maine Legislature in 1971 to protect, improve and conserve the 28 lakes & ponds within the “Cobossee Watershed”, which is located just west of Augusta. The economies of its 10 municipalities greatly depend on the lakes for property tax and tourism revenue.

CWD is also one of six lake organizations on the statewide Lake Protection Coalition steering committee. We are united in support of this bill which would put a small portion of money generated on behalf of a cleaner Maine environment back into environmental stewardship in Maine.

Please consider the following points:

1. Some Maine lakes are in trouble and we can expect this to get worse. For example, in the CWD, 5 of the lakes have impaired (poor) or declining water quality, and DEP has identified 22 of the 28 lakes as at risk from runoff pollution.
2. Funding for Maine lakes is severely limited. For perspective, there was only \$50,000 in the State's Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund last year. In the CWD alone, last year that amount was spent (nothing from the fund) on lake pollution control measures on one road in one lake watershed. To save Maine lakes, the lake protection community of professionals and citizens needs funding commensurate with the actual problems our valuable lakes are facing. The Lake Restoration and Protection Fund was established in 1981 and was used to restore and protect Maine lakes for only a few years. It enabled some important work to be accomplished, including a highly successful lake restoration project in the Cobossee Watershed. The fund was subsequently zero-funded for more than three decades until Rep. Bridgeo's initiative in 2023 was supported by the ENR Committee and a few breaths of air stirred it back to life. That appropriation of \$200,000 was a welcome start, which then faltered to \$50,000 in 2025. That isn't even a band aid. The proposed \$2,000,000 portion of unclaimed bottle deposits to be annually dedicated to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund is a meaningful but not excessive response to those challenges.

3. Lake attributes are wide-ranging and benefit Maine's public, and our visitors, in multiple ways. For example, within the Cobossee Watershed there are beautiful clear water lakes with cold water fisheries – the iconic Maine lakes, which we have a responsibility to preserve. There are lakes with unique fish populations that IF&W prioritizes for preservation. There is a public drinking water supply lake. It would be devastating to lose any of these. There are lakes that have been polluted but then

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restored with much effort and money; these gains must be protected. There are lakes with documented decline that we need to put the brakes on. And there are lakes with severe algal blooms where people want to fish and swim and wildlife should thrive - these are priorities for restoration; fly low over those lakes in August and you will see a murky brownish-green unpleasant looking Pleasant Pond, and a very green sometimes shimmering neon Annabessacook Lake, both signaling for help.

4. It usually costs less to protect a lake than to restore it, which is a very strong reason to put money into the fund NOW before any more water quality degradation occurs. At the same time, for those lakes that will need in-lake treatments, the state should have funding to bring these lakes into water quality classification compliance. It can be done. CWD implemented an alum treatment on Cochnewagon Lake, which cost \$400,000 for 225 acres of treatment:

- ✓ Water quality improvements were immediate.
- ✓ Algae blooms that had turned the lake pea-soup green were eliminated.
- ✓ The lake no longer violated its State of Maine water quality classification.
- ✓ Property values increased.
- ✓ Local economic development increased.

5. With sufficient funding, we can implement scientific and appropriate solutions to make a difference. As an example:

Annabessacook Lake in Winthrop and Monmouth used to have clear water. It used to have oxygen in the deeper waters and a cold-water fishery. Due to pollution, water quality deteriorated rapidly in the late 1940's and early 50's. The trout fishery was lost. By the 1960's lake residents had stopped swimming in the thick green water and were removing truckloads of decaying algae from their shorefronts to get rid of the flies and the stench. The cold-water fishery will not be coming back. Water quality has improved though with 50 years of collaborative efforts by DEP, CWD, the towns of Monmouth and Winthrop, an outstanding lake association, and dedicated citizens. The lake now has good water clarity until mid-summer, but it then turns cloudy green with an algal bloom that lasts for two months. To some extent the Annabessacook story is a model of what can be achieved, and of how LWQRP Funds could be used. We conducted an alum treatment to keep phosphorus that was upwelling from former sewage discharges into the lake; built storage facilities with farmers to keep manure from running into the lake; bought a street sweeper for the municipalities to keep sand and road contaminants from washing into downtown storm sewers; installed best management practices on roads to treat or divert erosion and sediment problems; and worked with property owners to improve lake friendly practices on their properties. But we are only part way there. It's not okay that in late summer we have to recommend that pets and young children stay away from any scums of algae at the water's edge so they don't swallow potentially toxic algae. Have you heard of Harmful Algal Blooms, or HABS? Some species of algae, cyanobacteria actually, have the ability to produce toxins which can be harmful. In the CWD those algae scums have appeared not only on Annabessacook Lake but also on Cobossee Lake and on Pleasant Pond and on Wilson Pond. Climate change has the potential to make this worse and more widespread. We have data that demonstrate changes are happening.

In conclusion, many of the funding sources we had for the prior work have disappeared or are woefully inadequate. There is no shortage of what LWQRP Funds could be used for, and that includes for DEP for more monitoring, research, education, and more staffing for enforcement of Maine's current environmental laws such as Shoreland Zoning and NRPA. Towns and nonprofits and citizens already invest their time and money but they need the state as a partner in the work to save Maine's lakes. CWD is confident DEP will use this money wisely. This bill is an incredible, highly supportable, opportunity. Desirable lakes are one of the driving reasons why Maine is vacationland and why Maine is where we live. We all need clean water, including the beverage industry. The CWD strongly supports LD2141. Thank you.

Wendy Dennis

Wendy Dennis, Limnologist, Cobossee Watershed District. cwd@fairpoint.net February 4, 2026

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