



Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 4, 2026

RE: 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

Dear Sen. Tepler, Rep. Doudera, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon’s Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation nonprofit – 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 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*.

It is our understanding that an estimated \$10 to \$17 million in bottle deposits go unclaimed in Maine each year. Those funds have great potential to support several important environmental and working lands initiatives. This sensible measure would direct a portion of Maine’s unclaimed beverage container deposits toward lake restoration and farmland protection. As a member of the Maine Climate Council’s Natural and Working Lands Working Group, I am particularly focused on advancing all of our group’s recommendations, which includes farmland protection. However, today my focus is on the opportunity to support the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund through this bill as this fund is closest to my organization’s mission.

Healthy lakes and ponds are essential to Maine wildlife and Maine’s economy. For Common Loons, clean water is critical, as they are visual predators that rely on clear waters to see and pursue fish. Common Loons hold a special place in the hearts and minds of all who see and hear them. Their striking plumage, soulful cries, and ability to seemingly vanish under water have inspired legends of magic, mysticism, and creation for many centuries. For more than 40 years, Maine Audubon has worked to assess the status and safeguard the future of Maine’s loon population. Through the Maine Loon Project we work with residents and partners statewide to promote healthy lakes, clean water, and quality habitat for loons and to understand trends in their population over time. We engage lake users in efforts to protect loons from threats like boat strikes, nest washouts from boat wakes, and nest site



disturbance during the vulnerable period of egg incubation. Across Maine, there are more than 2,000 loon conservation volunteers that dedicate time and energy to observing and protecting Common Loons. Mainers care deeply about this iconic species and are eager to support initiatives – like this bill – to help protect Common Loon habitat and health. Unfortunately, the cost of keeping our lakes and ponds clean and healthy is growing each year, outpacing existing funding sources. This bill would infuse the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund with funding needed to support strategies to protect this unparalleled resource.

Funds could be used for a variety of strategies. For example, the LakeSmart program has identified hundreds of best management practices (BMPs) on more than 35 lakes across Maine that must be implemented to protect lake water quality. BMPs include planting vegetative buffers and rain gardens, as well as other simple measures such as “rubber razors” and infiltration trenches. In addition, aging septic systems in poor soils need to be replaced because they pose a threat to lake water quality. Furthermore, funding for invasive species prevention programs like the Maine Department of Environmental Protection’s Courtesy Boat Inspection and Lake and River Protection Sticker programs have not kept pace with inflation, rising salaries, and growing demand. These strategies are crucial to protecting the health of Maine lakes and ponds and the wildlife that call them home

Given the sponsor’s amendment, we would like to respectfully suggest several additional destinations for these funds, such as the Land for Maine’s Future Trust Fund, Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program, Coastal Sand Dune Restoration and Protection Fund, and/or the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund. All of these funds are critical to advancing a broad range of the state’s natural resource conservation goals – and they all desperately need funding.

We strongly encourage the Committee to support this bill and appreciate your consideration of our suggestions for how to augment the proposal’s impact further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesca Gundrum".

Francesca “Ches” Gundrum
Director of Advocacy