

Good afternoon Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ari Fischer, and I am here on behalf of Protect Downeast, a local coalition of fishermen and women, clambers, wormers, residents, and people who care deeply about and depend on Chandler Bay.

I respectfully urge you to amend LD 2187 to upgrade Chandler Bay from Class SB to Class SA waters.

Over four consecutive years of monitoring by the Darling Marine Center, Chandler Bay has demonstrated exceptionally high water quality that meets or exceeds Class SA standards. Their 2025 summary concludes that the bay continues to maintain pristine conditions and qualifies as waters of outstanding ecological importance.

But this issue is about more than water chemistry. It is about ecological significance and a unique body of water that has been sustaining heritage fisheries in this region for generations.

Chandler Bay and its tributaries meet the statutory definition of an "outstanding natural resource" due to their exceptional water quality, abundant eelgrass, and designation as Essential Fish Habitat by NOAA.

Essential Fish Habitat is not a casual label – it identifies areas that are critical to the survival and recovery of federally managed species, including endangered Atlantic salmon. Chandler Bay is home to 17 out of 22 endangered finfish species – an incredible claim.

A majority of Maine's endangered finfish species depend on high-quality coastal habitat at some stage of their life cycle. Clean, oxygen-rich waters and intact eelgrass systems like those in Chandler Bay are not optional – they are foundational to species survival.

The State of Maine itself describes this stretch of the Downeast coast as a region of exceptional ecological integrity. The Wohoa Bay, Roque Bluffs, and Great Wass Archipelago Focus Areas – all hydrologically connected to Chandler Bay – are recognized for rare coastal plateau bogs, expansive eelgrass meadows, intact tidal marshes, and some of the most productive intertidal systems in the state.

These are not ordinary landscapes. They are identified as Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance.

The Geographic and Conservation Analysis further demonstrates that the watershed surrounding Chandler Bay is overwhelmingly conserved.

In the immediate reclassification area alone, 87% of conservation projects carry the highest levels of biodiversity protection.

State parks, wildlife management areas, municipal recreation sites, and permanently protected conservation lands surround this bay.

In other words, the land protection reflects what everyone already understands: this is a rare and exceptional place.

Maine's anti-degradation policy is clear – when actual water quality exceeds the minimum standards of the next highest classification, that higher quality must be maintained and protected

Chandler Bay is already functioning as Class SA waters.

Reclassification would not change its character. It would simply align the legal standard with the ecological reality – and ensure that this pristine system, its endangered species habitat, its eelgrass beds, and its local fisheries are protected and can continue to flourish.

The question before you is not whether Chandler Bay is exceptional. The data, the conservation landscape, and the State's own ecological designations make that clear.

The question is whether we will protect it accordingly.

I respectfully urge you to amend LD 2187 to upgrade Chandler Bay to Class SA.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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