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Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
LD 593, An Act to Restore Regular Mapping of Eelgrass Beds in the State

Testimony of Rep. Joyce McCreight
March 15, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, distinguished members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, I am Jay McCreight, Representative for House District 51, Harpswell, West Bath and Northeast Brunswick. I am here today to present **LD 593, An Act to Restore Regular Mapping of Eelgrass Beds in the State**. What I'm offering today is an amendment that is identical to the original bill except that it adds enhanced salt marsh vegetation mapping along with the restoration of eelgrass bed mapping. Since eelgrass and salt marshes are present in the same coastal areas and because up-to-date mapping of both is important to the health of our coastal ecosystem, this seemed a logical addition to this proposal.

In the 129th, the ENR committee voted unanimously in support of restoring eelgrass mapping; unfortunately the bill died at the conclusion of the legislative session. I reintroduce it now, with the addition described. The rationale is this: Both resources provide critical benefits for our coastal ecosystem. They have been described as carbon "sinks" – powerhouses of carbon absorption and storage that hold carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere, helping to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. But that's not all. They provide critical habitat for young aquatic creatures, foraging areas and shelter for young fish and invertebrates, food for migratory waterfowl and spawning surfaces for many aquatic species. And there's more! They also provide a buffer that helps mitigate shoreline erosion, and protect water quality by filtering polluted runoff and removing excess nutrients.

Regular mapping is the key and has been identified by the Maine Coastal and Marine Working Group of the Climate Council. It will give us the information we need to identify not only where eelgrass beds and salt marshes are, but will allow us to keep track of their health so that we can preserve and, where possible, restore them. Understanding of eelgrass and salt marsh locations will be used among other things, for Natural Resources Protection Act permitting, oil spill response actions, and for review of aquaculture lease applications.

District 51: Harpswell, West Bath, Brunswick (part)

Specifically, this bill proposes that the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) will establish and carry out, in coordination with the Maine Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), a program of mapping done primarily through aerial photography. The proposed program would include annual mapping of one of each of five coastal segments in rotation, resulting in complete mapping of the entire coast from Southern Maine to Down East Maine every five years.

Because access to data is key to good stewardship of our natural resources, this bill also provides that there will be public access to the data through the state website and through biennial reports produced by MDEP staff. Those reports will also be presented to the joint standing committee with jurisdiction over environmental and natural resources.

Thank you for your attention. I ask for your support of this proposal and am happy to do my best to answer any questions.