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I live in Sedgwick, Hancock County

Thank you for addressing eelgrass and calling for regular mapping of eelgrass, this importance resource and habitat indicator. This bill tackles an important problem and should be strengthened to (1) accelerate the mapping timetable, (2) to include all brackish tidal areas, which can reach far inland given Maine's complex coastline, and (3) to direct the agency to develop a plan to address the problem. In the age of drones and citizen science, such mapping can be carried out much faster than the bill's current timetable suggests.

I live in Sedgwick on the upper section of the Bagaduce tidal river and estuary, upstream from the reversing falls between Brooksville and Segwick, an area that Maine has identified as a "focus area of statewide ecological significance," (https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mnap/focusarea/bagaduce_river_focus_area.pdf). I am directly impacted by changes in that estuary.

And I want to ring the alarm bell. It used to be that eelgrass would wash up regularly with strong winds and tides. In past years residents describe seeing some beds when paddling. But in one year - this past year, 2020 - the eelgrass has vanished. It is gone, 100%. Neighbors have noted the same thing. As a result, or perhaps a cause, the upper part of the estuary is increasingly silted and black.

This reality, at least upstream of Reversing Falls, is a far cry from the "abundant eelgrass beds" and wildlife described in the state brochure, which presumably provides a baseline against which to measure what has been lost:
"...the reversing falls also contribute to unique ecological conditions upstream that in turn support abundant wildlife. [...] The [reversing] falls limit tidal fluctuations upstream, creating more protected conditions ideal for a productive shellfishery. Oysters, clams, and other shellfish and marine invertebrates thrive in the nutrient rich, shallow, sheltered waters. These same conditions also support abundant eelgrass beds in Snow Cove and in Northern Bay (especially from Johnson Point to Gravel Island). The vast underwater meadows provide valuable nursery, shelter, and feeding area for many fish, waterfowl, wading birds, invertebrates, and other wildlife. ..."

Monitoring this importance resource and understanding what is happening is an immediate first step. Developing a plan to correct the problem is the next. Please therefore (1) accelerate the mapping program so that it is completed in its entirety not by 2026 but much sooner; (2) Please also ensure the upper sections of estuaries such as the Bagaduce are fully covered by the mapping; (3) last but not least, please direct the DEP to develop a plan to correct the problem. Finally, I do not know whether the funding levels described in the bill are adequate. I support full funding as needed by the DEP to carry out this work in its entirety.

Thank you.