



**Testimony of the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the
Maine Council of the Atlantic Salmon Federation on
LD 1488: Resolve, To Study and Recommend Improvements to Maine's Dam Safety
May 3, 2021**

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is John Burrows, and I am the Executive Director of U.S. Operations for the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF), an international non-profit conservation organization. Today I am speaking on behalf of both ASF and the Maine Council of ASF (MCASF), which is comprised of a dozen angling, conservation, education, and watershed organizations located across Maine. We represent more than 2,500 Maine citizens and our collective mission is to conserve and restore wild Atlantic salmon and their ecosystems.

ASF and MCASF respectfully submit the following comments in strong support of **LD 1488: Resolve, To Study and Recommend Improvements to Maine's Dam Safety**. Maine's dam safety program is under-resourced and lacks the legal mandates necessary to protect public safety, infrastructure, and the environment. The staff at the Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) tasked with dam safety do an excellent job with the tools and resources that they have, but their toolbox lacks some of the tools that their counterparts in other states have to do this critically important job.

Unlike many other states, Maine does not have a dam registry, so we do not even know how many dams there are in the State. One list states that there are approximately 500 dams, while another list reports that there are around 1,000, but we simply do not know the true number. As anglers and paddlers that are on the water in all corners of the state, and as conservationists that work collaboratively with public and private dam owners to restore fisheries – through dam removal or the construction of fishways at dams – we know that there are a very large number of dams on Maine's landscape and that many of them are in less than good condition. Our experience is supported by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), who have regularly given Maine's dam infrastructure a grade of D+ in their Maine Infrastructure Report Card since 2008.

Maine law does not even require most dam owners to maintain their dams. Some dam owners do a very good job of maintaining their dams and take their responsibility seriously. This includes several municipalities and private lake/dam associations. But, unfortunately, many dam owners do very little when it comes to repairing and maintaining their dams. As these dams age and deteriorate, the threat to public safety, public and private infrastructure, and our aquatic ecosystems grows. And, with a rapidly changing climate where severe storm events are becoming more common, it is critical that Maine's dam

infrastructure be maintained at higher standards in order to avoid catastrophic failure that threatens life and property.

Unfortunately, it has often taken dam failure or the threat of a disaster to make states assess and improve their dam safety programs. This is true of many states in the northeast – New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania – and as part of this study we can look to lessons learned from those states and others and make changes to our program before a disaster happens.

A disaster is what happened in Alton, New Hampshire, back in late winter 1996 when a private dam at Meadow Pond breached and sent a 10-foot wall of water downstream toward the community. Sadly, a woman was killed while trying to escape the floodwaters. An investigation into the dam's collapse found flaws in the Meadow Pond Dam's design and construction. In Taunton, Massachusetts, the Whittenton Mill Dam nearly collapsed on multiple occasions, the last being in autumn 2005. The threat of dam failure forced the evacuation of parts of downtown Taunton and troops from the National Guard were deployed to the community. The wooden dam held, but the evacuation cost the town approximately \$1.5 million. The dam was ultimately removed in 2013.

These incidents in New Hampshire and Massachusetts lead both states to review and make changes to their dam safety programs. We should not wait for disaster to strike in Maine before studying and improving our dam safety program. We believe that the study outlined in LD 1488 is a reasonable, proactive approach to reviewing Maine's dam safety program, and that having the national Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) complete a peer review of the program will provide tremendously valuable information to help guide future decisions on changes and modifications to the program.

We very much support LD 1488, and ASF and the MCASF offer our expertise and experience working on dam and natural resource related issues to the study group.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



John R.J. Burrows
Executive Director, U.S. Operations
Atlantic Salmon Federation

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I previously signed up to testify at today's hearing and am now submitting my written testimony.