

LD 1600 Support Comments May 6, 2021

Dear Environment and Natural Resources Committee Members,

I am writing in support of LD 1600, which would mandate additional testing for PFAS in Maine. In the last few years it has become apparent that Maine has a problem with contamination from these “forever chemicals”. In order to plan a strategy to control these toxins we need to comprehensively test for their presence.

Farmers who were allowing sewage sludge to be spread on their fields as an agricultural amendment have been put out of business due to the PFAS contaminating their land and water. Restrictions on land-spreading of these sludges means that tens of thousands of tons of sludges have been dumped into our State-owned Juniper Ridge Landfill (JRL) in Old Town, about a mile and three quarters from my home. The same company that operates JRL for the State, Casella, is engaged in large-scale importation and processing of sewage sludges at its Hawk Ridge facility in Unity.

Precipitation falling on JRL and decomposition of the landfill contents yields about 15 million gallons of toxic leachate per year, which is trucked to the Nine Dragons Paper Mill’s Wastewater Treatment Plant in Old Town. This plant was not designed to treat leachate; liquids are possibly adjusted for PH and aerated to remove BODs before being released into the Penobscot River. The leachate needs to be tested for PFAS as it is leaving JRL along with a long list of other chemicals currently analyzed. Even more importantly, the waste outflow from Nine Dragons needs to be tested for PFAS. Currently there are less than a dozen tests done on that material and only once a year.

LD 1600 could help determine just where these PFAS (which come into JRL in sewage sludges and other wastes) end up. One reason they are called “forever chemicals” is that it takes extremely high temperatures to destroy PFAS compounds, and there is nothing in the current leachate disposal process that can safely neutralize these toxins.

Over the last decade Maine has benefited from the Penobscot River Restoration Project. Close to a million alewives now run up Pushaw Stream which borders our property. Unfortunately, barely treated leachate threatens the future of the Penobscot River watershed. Our neighbors in the Penobscot Nation rely on these waters for sustenance and cultural continuity. Better testing for PFAS will be a good step toward these worthwhile goals, and that is why I urge you to support LD 1600.

Respectfully yours,

Ed Spencer

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