

**Testimony in Opposition to LD 1979, An Act To Sustain Good-paying Jobs in the Forest Products Industry by Ensuring Consistency between Comprehensive River Resource Management Plans and State Water Quality Standards**

Ray (Bucky) Owen, Orono

February 28, 2022

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

Good morning. My name is Bucky Owen, and I reside in Orono. I am a former Commissioner of Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and chair of the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Conservation Biology at the University of Maine. I was very proud to play a role in the removal of the Edwards Dam and in the removal of two dams on the Penobscot River and development of innovative fish passage at others as part of the Penobscot Restoration Initiative. I am testifying in opposition to LD 1979.

In 1999, the Edwards Dam removal sparked a dramatic rebirth of the Kennebec River below Waterville. In 2008, the removal of the Fort Halifax Dam at the mouth of the Sebasticook speeded up the process, and now the Kennebec below Waterville supports significantly improved runs of native sea-run fish. Millions of alewives, a keystone species in Maine because everything that eats fish eats alewives, have returned in significant numbers. Eagles swam the banks of the Sebasticook River to feed on these fish. American shad have also started to come back and support good recreational fisheries below Waterville. On the Penobscot, the story is similar. Millions of alewives have returned to the river and people are catching shad there for the first time in more than a century.

Unfortunately for the Kennebec, and the whole Gulf of Maine ecosystem, restoration progress has stopped at Waterville because of four dams Brookfield Renewables owns. The company has failed to live up to its obligations to pass native sea-run fish. The dams kill and delay critically endangered Atlantic salmon during both their upstream and downstream migrations. Now, Brookfield is pushing LD 1979 in a bid to make it even harder for Maine to restore native fish to their historic ranges. This bill would make it impossible for Maine's resource agencies to recommend fish passage that is any more stringent than the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) proposes to protect endangered species like Atlantic salmon. FERC is not an entity that typically values fisheries resources, and it is important for Maine scientists at our resource agencies to be able make recommendations that are stronger than FERC's when necessary, even if FERC has the authority to make the final licensing decisions on fish passage standards.

LD 1979 will harm what has been a remarkably successful two decades of fisheries restoration in Maine, and it will likely make projects like the Edwards Dam removal and the Penobscot Restoration Initiative impossible. These projects have received widespread support from Maine people and around the globe. They have served as both nationally and internationally significant examples of successful river restoration. I urge the Committee to allow Maine to continue to be a leader in river restoration and vote against LD 1979.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Ray Owen  
Orono  
LD 1979

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