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Submitted on behalf of H.P. 105 An Act to Fund the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund

Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, January 30, 2023

We are camp owners on Big Lake in eastern Washington County. We want to encourage members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee to support H.P. 105 which transfers \$9 million dollars in each of the next two years into the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund.

About five years ago, invasive Milfoil was discovered in our lake. This discovery shocked us, the lake preservation community in Maine and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Before this discovery, the progression of infestations from the southern part of the state had been gradual. Suddenly we discovered that the problem had “leapt over the fire line” by hundreds of miles, and a vast new part of our State was threatened.

The lake preservation community in Maine instinctively understands that an infestation of something like milfoil anywhere in Maine threatens all of Maine. A boat with dangerous milfoil fragments can cross our state in less than day. We were grateful that groups like the Lake Stewards of Maine, whose members reside primarily in central and southern Maine, came to our aid with volunteer surveyors, sacrificing weeks of their valuable time. At the same time, the DEP’s Invasive Species Program, recognizing the threat this discovery represented to a vast new portion of our State, stepped in with a grant to help with removal. You as legislators can be proud of the caring, committed and competent professionals in the DEP who work on the invasive species problem. We as property owners and local citizens also understood that we must do our part and we formed a coalition headed by The Downeast Lakes Land Trust, with strong support and cooperation from the Passamaquoddy Tribe.

The stabilization of our lake is far from over, but what we have learned on our journey thus far leads to two key recommendations in the context of your hearing today:

1. The kind of infestation we discovered at Big Lake, would be difficult anywhere in Maine, but it is especially challenging in the less populated and poorer parts of our state, areas which sadly are the new frontier for these infestations as warming trends move further north. The ability to mobilize local resources, whether they be donations or volunteer

manpower is much more limited. We have benefitted from the Milfoil Boat Tax, which along with some modest federal grants to DEP is the revenue stream that allowed DEP to give us a grant to fund divers to remove the milfoil. **But in the invasive plant area, those revenue sources are not sufficient to keep up with the growing problem in Maine. Hence your consideration today of a direct appropriation is both justified and welcome and will give the Commissioner and his staff more tools to work with.** We recognize the reluctance you as legislators feel toward taking on new claims against general revenues. The word “investment” is sometimes used too casually to justify any new spending. But you have before you evidence from credible economists as to the extraordinary twelve billion dollar impact our clean lakes have on the Maine economy which generates those tax revenues. “Investing” in keeping the lakes clean and free of infestations ensures the tax revenue stream remains strong and is an appropriate use of the word.

2. When the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund was created in the late 1980s, invasive plants were not a big issue in Maine. While the language of the enacting legislation clearly appears to be broad enough to encompass the funding of efforts to control invasive plants, you may wish to consider sharpening up the definitions in that statute to include them more specifically. Equally important, we would recommend that you review the 50% match required to receive help from the fund. As a practical matter, this makes the Fund inaccessible to the poorer and less populated parts of the state. **As a matter of equity, you should consider a progressive formula for the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund which takes into consider an area’s ability to contribute its match based on population density and economic strength.** Big Lake, for example, is one of the largest lakes in Maine, covering 10,444 acres. Much of it is shallow and thus subject to milfoil growth so maintaining it is a huge task. While it is a prime destination for thousands of small mouth bass anglers from all over Maine and beyond, a vast amount of the shoreline is undeveloped, and in a conservancy, and will never be built upon. Thus the actual population on the lake is very small and cannot grow. Our ability to protect this lake for the benefit of all Mainers is limited by our numbers and our location in the poorest county in Maine. This is an all-too-common problem for the economically challenged areas of our state.

While we are encouraged by the rapid action of the State of Maine and the many dedicated volunteers who reacted to our situation at Big Lake, the experience has forced us to study lake protection issues. We now know that the threat to our lakes is increasing and requires an even greater degree of attention than ever before. The threat is real, and we cannot take it for granted. The consequence of failure is something for which our children would never forgive us. So, thank you to the members of this important committee and to your fellow legislators for your commitment to Maine lakes and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to this hearing.