



Jessica L. Fay

141 Spiller Hill Road

Raymond, ME 04071

Phone: (207) 415-4218

Jessica.Fay@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Testimony In Favor of LD 394

An Act To Protect Maine's Loons and Other Wildlife in the Issuance of a Permit To Hold a Regatta, Race or Boat or Water-ski Exhibition

Sen. Dill, Rep. Landry and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, I am Jessica Fay representing HD 66, Casco, Poland and Raymond. I am testifying in favor of LD 394 "An Act To Protect Maine's Loons and Other Wildlife in the Issuance of a Permit To Hold a Regatta, Race or Boat or Water-ski Exhibition"

As many of you know, I have been an advocate for water safety, water quality, and for appropriate levels of wildlife protection. I think this bill makes progress in that direction. Allowing the Commissioner to take environmental concerns into account when issuing a permit for a boat race, regatta, or water-ski exhibition makes sense.

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's self-stated mission "preserves, protects, and enhances the inland fisheries and wildlife resources of the state...to include protection and management of fish, non-game wildlife, and habitats, as well as restoration of endangered species like the bald eagle. In addition to its conservation duties, MDIFW is also responsible for enabling and promoting the safe enjoyment of Maine's outdoors... The agency's constituents include the fish, wildlife, and people who call Maine home, as well as the visiting outdoor enthusiasts and ecotourists who call Maine Vacationland and contribute hundreds of millions of dollars each year to the state's economy."

There are clearly water bodies where it is reasonable and appropriate to hold speed boat races, regattas or water-ski exhibitions and some where it may not be. There are likely to be some water bodies where event plans might be modified based on criteria that the Commissioner deemed appropriate in order to hold an event safely. Current statute seems to suggest that a permit may either be issued or not, and there is no room for the Dept. to place conditions on an event.

Studies have shown that large and frequent boat wakes cause turbidity, which has a negative impact on water quality and wildlife, particularly loons during nesting season. Certain speeds can create larger wakes and cause damaging shoreline erosion if those wakes are created within several hundred feet of shore. Additionally, large wakes and the turbidity, and erosion they cause, have a negative effect on water quality. If we want to protect our lakes and ponds then it seems appropriate to take these impacts into consideration when permitting events that might cause damage to the resources that really belong to us all.

Over the last decade or so, I have witnessed an increase in boating of all kinds on Maine's inland waters. It is wonderful that so many people have discovered how special a day on the water can be. Our local economy in my District is heavily dependent on both the quality of that experience as well as the number of people who can participate. Unfortunately, sometimes this usage presents challenges to our natural environment and wildlife, the very thing that draws folks here in the first place. As with everything, as this Committee is well aware, there must be balance between the social and environmental and this bill has the potential to strike that balance.

Thank you for your thoughtful attention.