

testimony for LD 394, Pokras, 3.1.2021

Dear Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and distinguished members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee in support 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.”

I’m here today wearing two hats. As a Maine resident, my family has owned a small camp on Toddy Pond for decades. My kids and grandkids have grown up fishing and boating on “our” lake. I can tell you from personal experience that I understand and value the importance of protecting the wonderful natural resources of our state and that these resources are crucial economically and ecologically as well as being an important legacy for future generations.

I’m also here as a wildlife veterinarian who has worked with state, federal and private organizations to investigate threats to Maine’s loons for over 30 years. In that capacity I can state that motorboat races are a regular cause of common loon mortality in Maine as well as in other states in which this species breeds.

The nature of motorboat racing means that significant numbers of boats traveling at high speeds are occupying large areas of a lake – often for several days in succession. The boats are fast and drivers can’t readily see dark-colored birds on the water or maneuver out of their way. Wakes from fast moving boats can also flood low lying loon nests along the shore. Loons are tightly bound to their territories on a lake during the breeding season. These large, heavy-bodied birds need a large expanse of water to take flight and could easily be disoriented by the loud noises and visual confusion that large numbers of racing boats bring to a lake – making them more likely to be hit during races.

Maine certainly has some large lakes where boat racing activities could be planned in a way to have little or no impact on wildlife. But on smaller bodies of water that have breeding loons or other sensitive species there may not be ways for such boat races to be held in a way that does not threaten wildlife. It is important that our state agency, MDIF&W, have clear authority to impose limits on such activities when considering the issuance of permits.

LD 394 will give MDIF&W an important tool to protect Maine's precious wildlife resources. It will not impact recreational boating, except perhaps to enhance the enjoyment of Maine's resident wildlife by recreational boaters.

I urge that you support this important legislation to protect Maine's loons and other wildlife during state-sanctioned regattas, races, and boat or water-ski exhibitions.

Thank you for your attention.

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