

Testimony / LD 394

“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.”

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and distinguished members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. I want to thank you for allowing me to speak about LD 394 and share with you why this subject is so important to me.

I live in Gray Maine on the shore of Little Sebago Lake. It has been my home now for 24 years. My childhood summers were spent at the family camp in Belgrade on the shore of Great Pond. The importance and love of all thing’s lake related are embedded in my heart and in my soul. The natural environment and all its wildlife are what makes Maine’s lakes special. Special to those of us fortunate to live there, and special to those who come from near and far to visit for a day, or for a week, or for the season. Special also to every community in Maine that benefits from the tourism economy driven by the opportunities afforded by our inland waters.

One of the most rewarding things I do every summer is to serve as coordinator for the Little Sebago Lake Loon Monitoring and Conservation Program. We recognize how fortunate we are to have a population of loons on our lake and do everything possible to protect and preserve that good fortune. Trained volunteers patrol the lake throughout the season watching for loon nesting activities and taking steps to assure that every nest is marked as a protected Loon Sanctuary and remains undisturbed through the nesting and chick rearing months. Each summer we monitor and record data identifying territorial pairs, mating activities, nest building, eggs lain, chicks hatched, and chicks that survive to maturity. We band new parent adults and monitor their return from one season to another, as well as their fidelity to the nest site and to their mate. We monitor reproductive success as it determines the sustainability of the populations, and in addition, it serves as a barometer of the quality of the lake ecosystem. (Healthy lakes attract wildlife as well as human inhabitants.) Our Little Sebago loon data is shared nationally with like loon preservation organizations.

Some years are wonderful reproductive seasons, and we get to watch several chicks from birth through migration. In the past couple years, there has been fewer successful chick survivals and on occasion we have had to recover deceased chicks. We have also recovered dead adults. In 2019, we recovered an un-banded adult whose neck had been nearly severed. It was a grotesque sight, obviously the result of a propellor strike. It is hard to describe how incredible it is to hold an adult loon. They are magnificent creatures, strikingly beautiful, and far larger than one would imagine from pictures. I have had the opportunity to assist with banding operations several times. When I held that deceased adult with its throat slashed, instead of a healthy adult about to be banded - it was beyond heartbreaking.

This is why I feel compelled to speak up, because by enacting this simple “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” we may save the life of one of these amazing creatures. Permitting for such events, with preservation considerations for loons and wildlife, makes sense. Active territorial nesting areas need protection. Little Sebago happens to be a long narrow lake, with three interconnected bays, dotted with island and irregular shorelines. It is a perfect habitat for loons during their nesting season, but it is not an

appropriate venue for high-speed events, in part because of the loon nesting territories, and in part because the narrowness of the lake would mean that the wake caused by these events would cause shoreline erosion.

I am sure others will speak to the more technical aspects of why that LD 394 should be enacted and expand on the frightening statistic that shows 30% of adult loon deaths are now caused by boat strikes. I'm also sure they will show you loon count data that supports the reports I've heard from many who have been on the lake for generations, that tell me the loons had all but left the lake for decades in the mid 1900's and have only more recently enjoyed a rebound. I borrowed the following quote from an April 2016 Down East magazine article as it describes the importance of this species so well:

"...they're charismatic birds," Gallo says. "They're big and striking, and if you're on a lake in Maine, you're going to hear those amazing wails. People are passionate about loons — they represent wilderness, remoteness, and peacefulness. Their presence is a sign that everything is going right. For Maine Audubon, they're a good way to get people involved in caring for our lakes' water quality. You can tell people how the phosphates in their detergent are going to affect all the little microscopic creatures, and it won't have much of an impact. But if you say that loons won't be able to live there because they won't be able to see the fish, they get interested. Maine Audubon's interest goes beyond the loon: you won't have loons in a lake that doesn't have healthy fish or clean water." (<https://downeast.com/land-wildlife/maine-loon/>)

Today I'm here speaking to you, and sharing with you, from my heart. Loons so exemplify lake life. Not only their beauty, but their distinctive calls, are what make them so loved by so many lake visitors. I urge you to vote to enact LD 394 and help protect Maine's loons and other wildlife from the hazards of boat racing. By doing so you will help protect a cherished icon.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my heartfelt testimony.

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