

December 8, 2020

Dear Commissioner Camuso, Ms. Orff and MDIFW Advisory Council,

I am writing to you regarding the proposed new rules for airboats and to encourage you to take into consideration the health and needs all of us who will be affected by your decision. As a shared resource, the waters of Maine provide for the community in a broad spectrum of ways. There are many factors that must be taken into consideration for the well-being of all, including the health of the wildlife that inhabit these ecosystems, those who work on the bay, those who live near the bay, those who use the bay to gather scientific data (high school and college students, birdwatchers, etc.) and those who recreate on or near the waters.

When I first heard that the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife had been tasked with creating regulation for airboat noise and use, I was relieved because I generally think of this board as unbiased, one that takes a broad overview on issues and considers the impact on all. I was literally stunned and started crying where I sat when I heard the proposed ruling from November 11<sup>th</sup> that exempted airboats from any noise rules and that allow airboats to operate unrestricted in Maine waters at any time day or night. This ruling is in direct conflict to the mission statement of the department which promises, "MDIFW protects and manages Maine's fish and wildlife and their habitats, promotes Maine's outdoor heritage, and safely connects people with nature through responsible recreation, sport, and science." It also indicates that there has been no regard for all of the voices who have reached out to the department and shared their personal stories of how not only their lives, but wildlife and their habitats have been impacted since airboats have come to our waters.

My husband and I live across from the boat launch at Warton Point, so these matters affect us daily. We are committed environmentalists, citizen scientists and birdwatchers. We, like our neighbors on Woodside, Maquoit, Rossmore and Bunganuc, consider ourselves to be stewards of the land, the water and the wildlife and people that inhabit both. We observe changes, we clean up along the roads and the landing itself (not a task for the queasy, I tell you!), we shiver with delight when we watch our neighbors' children dip into the chilly water, keep treats on hand for the dogs that get walked past our homes, we are awe-struck by the sunset every single night and send photos to each other when we capture a good one. We are a community of working people, retired people and families with young children. We have mourned the loss of a few of our members over the years, prayed for the recovery of others as they are surviving cancer and other illnesses, and set up a neighborhood email during COVID to track grocery needs and lists of places to order-out from to support our local businesses. Through all of our differences and individual struggles, the thing we have in common is our love for the bay and surrounding lands. We are probably not unlike other communities, but this is my community, the one that I know.

Among those that I see daily throughout the season are the clambers that work on Maquoit Bay. There is no animosity between us or any issues with their right to be there and earn a

living. I love that this a working bay and respect the rigor of their backbreaking work (even as a gardener, I am sure I could not do it). Almost all of the clammers are respectful and do not go full throttle with their airboats as they head in and out from the launch. But there are a few who do to the dismay of the neighborhood and the other clammers (they understand that this reflects badly on all of them). These are the same ones who slam the doors of their vehicles upon arrival, talk loudly and crudely at their pre-tide gatherings and squeal out, driving too fast upon leaving. This is why noise regulation and restriction of hours is needed.

When my husband bought this fixer upper more than twenty years ago, there were plenty of clammers, but there were no airboats. What there was also plenty of, that has since either disappeared or severely diminished in numbers, is wildlife. This disappearance has not been a gradual decline, there is a direct correlation to the increased use of airboats. Eagles and herons nested (a few still do), flats of ducks used to fill the bay before taking flight, chattering overhead, those who chose to make homes here have gone to other places to nest and swim. See reports by the Audubon Society for specific effects on shorebirds. There are other factors that have affected our bay, the green crabs have destroyed the eel grass and mussel population and warming waters due to climate change is affecting the lobsters and maple trees. That is why it is even more critical that we protect the habitat that is still here! Since airboats have only been around since about 2015, there has not been enough time to do thorough impact studies. It saddens me that I even feel the need to emphasize this point, but in this latest ruling for all of the Maine waters where airboats are used, there seems to be no acknowledgement of this critical factor.

And now, let me tell you what it is like to live across from the landing where airboats are used. At any given tide, between eight and fourteen airboats go out. For each airboat, there is one or more vehicle that is parked at the landing (others cannot use the landing during this time). There needs to be a limit of how many boats can go out per tide based on bay size. The clammers arrive before the tide and hang out, chatting etc. waiting for the tide to go out. Great, humans are social beings and need to connect (something more clear now than ever). During waking hours, nobody in the neighborhood objects to a party, but in the middle of the night, this is unacceptable. There needs to be restricted hours for use of the landing and the bay for everyone. On the weeks that the tide is early (sometimes as early as 3:30 am), we are startled awake. Every. Single. Time. There is no sleeping through it and there is no going back to sleep, the limbic and adrenal system have sent the body into fight or flight and even when you know it is an airboat and not a fighter jet (which is what it sounds like) it takes a while for the body systems to normalize. Sleep deprivation is a severe health risk, and those weeks are hard. Living in a time when people are already anxious, it has been especially rough. I have included an article (there are numerous other articles and data to support this one) that discusses the short-term and long-term effects of sleep deprivation, but here are some of the highlights:

- Memory
- Lack of focus
- Weight gain
- Heart disease
- Compromised immune and respiratory systems
- Anxiety, moodiness, depression etc.

Please see article for more. <https://www.healthline.com/health/sleep-deprivation/effects-on-body#Immune-system>

There needs to be regulation on noise level and restricted hours of operation. This is literally having a negative impact on the health of the residents, including the wildlife who cannot speak for themselves in this process, along the waterfronts where airboats are used. We need to be able to concentrate and function safely at our jobs in order to make a living too.

I understand that it is a challenging task to balance the needs of all the members of this complicated ecosystem, but that is the responsibility that the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is entrusted to. We need to be able to trust that the department has done their job, done it fairly and done it thoroughly, in a way that respects and protects all of us.

I am urging the commission to honor the citizens who have reached out to express their concerns and share their stories. We are asking that you create a precedent that respects all members of community by creating the following rules

- Because airboats are too loud to comply with existing watercraft noise laws, and until there is another solution, adopt a speed limit for airboats near the shore to limit the noise.
- There needs to be a limit of how many boats can go out per tide based on bay size.
- Create a rule for allotted hours of operation for airboats from 7am to 7pm, with a restriction on nighttime operations.
- In order to allow the clam population to regenerate and thrive, rule a restriction for clamming on Sundays and holidays.

I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration on these matters and look forward to hearing back from you.

Thank you and stay safe in these strange times.

Respectfully,

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I oppose this bill.