



Testimony in **SUPPORT**:

**LD 1663: An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters**

*Submitted to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee*

*May 10, 2021*

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony for LD 1663 during this work session. My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 2,500 individual members, supporters and volunteers as well as over 80 Lake Associations. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for all Maine people.

**We urge the committee to support LD 1663 requiring a boater safety course for Maine boat operators.**

I have worked with lake users, boaters, anglers, loon counters and lake homeowners in the state of Maine for over 22 years. **EVERY YEAR** I hear dozens of complaints from frustrated observers about bad boating behavior. Primarily:

- Boats running too fast, risking collisions with swimmers, wildlife and other boats.
- Boats creating large wakes too close to shore that swamp lakeside loon nests, erode shorelines, and swamp nearby kayakers and canoers.
- Boats with trailers covered in plant material.

While we have laws that *should* prevent these behaviors, the reality is that these behaviors are prevalent on the water. A recent survey of our lake association members found that 64% have observed boaters putting people or wildlife at risk due to unsafe boating practices.

Observers feel helpless to remedy these situations. The need for boating law enforcement outstrips by many orders of magnitude the capacity of the Warden Service. And this need will only grow, as the number of boaters increases. Over 70% of respondents in our survey have seen increases in boating activity on their lakes in the last 3-4 years. Boating is a

“COVID safe” activity, so grew in popularity even more in 2020. The demand for new boats currently exceeds manufacturing capacity.

And that is exciting for Maine. Boaters are a source of economic activity that fuel many layers of our outdoor economy. They get people outside and help them enjoy Maine’s fabulous lake resources and all the benefits they offer. Maine Lakes supports boaters, and we are happy to welcome boaters who follow the rules, whose behavior does not lead to shoreline erosion and declines in water quality, who are aware of Maine’s unique wildlife habitat, and who protect our lakes from invasive species.

**There is no reason that every boater cannot be a safe boater.**

But we have to help them get there...educating boaters not just about the rules, but about WHY the rules are in place. We believe this is critically important for a boater safety course.

A good example for this is the Boat Safety Zone mandating headway speed within 200’ of shore. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been in a boat with someone on a lake who has broken this rule. When I’ve mentioned the rule, the typical response is a shrug and an eye roll. And usually a response like “well, that’s dumb”.

**That is not a good thing to say to me when I’m in your boat.**

Luckily, **ALMOST ALL THE TIME** when I explain how wakes from boats impact shorelines, how large wakes hitting the shore cause erosion so that sediment and phosphorus enter the lake (with phosphorus then feeding excess algae growth), and how those wakes also wash out lakeside loon nests, the boater immediately slows down in the Safety Zone.

It’s not enough to know the rules. People need to know **WHY** those rules are in place. That is the key to increasing compliance and decreasing the bad boat behaviors so many of us observe on our waters today.

**Maine Lakes would like to request the committee consider expanding the boater safety course beyond those born after 2002.**

If I had thought to ask our Lake Association members in our recent survey if they believed the unsafe boaters they saw were teenagers, I can **GUARANTEE** almost none of the behaviors I mentioned come from this cohort.

**The problem of not knowing and/or not understanding boating laws spans generations, and we will all be better served if the course was required of all Maine boaters.**

We believe a model like New Hampshire’s, which has different courses for visitors and residents, make a lot of sense for Maine. We do not believe this presents an undue burden on boaters’ time. **In fact, we believe the vast majority of boaters will welcome the opportunity to safeguard the safety and health of people, wildlife and lakes.**

In closing, Maine Lakes would also like to offer its assistance in any aspects of curriculum development, in any effort to get the word out about the course, and in any community-based social marketing efforts to improve compliance and behavior-change. We are pleased this bill has come before the committee, and urge you all to give it your complete support.