



Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

May 10, 2021

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

Dear Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1663, An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters, on behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters.

Maine Audubon has coordinated the Maine Loon Project for more than 30 years, seeking to understand threats to and population trends for one of Maine's most iconic species: the Common Loon. These birds breed on many of Maine's freshwater lakes in the summer, and face many challenges as they raise their chicks. Lead poisoning from discarded fishing gear; chick predation by fish, mammals, and raptors; entanglement in monofilament line; diseases and parasites; climatic changes to habitats; and, increasingly, nest loss or blunt force trauma from watercraft.

Results of ongoing mortality studies support the anecdotal reports of increased motor boat incidences involving loons. In a 25-year mortality study from 1987-2012, Gallo (2013) concluded that blunt trauma was the leading cause of mortality for loon chicks and the 3rd leading cause of mortality for adult loons. More recently, MacDonald (2018) concludes from results of ongoing mortality studies that blunt trauma, surpassed lead poisoning as the leading cause of adult loon death in Maine. In the DIFW 2019-20 Resource & Management Report, Danielle D'Auria reports that DIFW and partners necropsied twenty-eight adults that had been collected in 2019 and found that trauma was the leading cause of adult mortality, accounting for 29% of all deaths, above lead poisoning (18%) and fungal respiratory disease (21%).

An increasing component of our loon work has been fielding and responding to reports from lake-goers of inappropriate activity from boaters threatening loons and loon nests, and public reports of loon carcass findings. Concerned members of the public from lakes around the state reach out to report harassment; loon nests washed out by boat wake; party flotillas near nests; Boaters ignoring no-wake zones near nests; Loon mortality from vessel strikes; Excessive wake from wake boats; and loons fleeing speeding boats; among many others.

Taken together, evidence and anecdotal observations suggest that the threat to loons and other wildlife, water quality, nesting habitat, and shoreline property from high speed or large wake-

producing watercraft is growing and of increasing concern. Additionally, there are new kinds of vessels on the water, such as wake boats, that were not part of consideration when many of the existing rules were enacted.

Many of the complaints we received are paired with urgent requests for state warden assistance, and more education for boat operators about how to operate legally and safely in proximity to wildlife. We believe that a lack of education among boaters about no-wake zones, loon and other wildlife considerations, and other proper protocols is contributing to loon mortality and nest loss. State officials cannot patrol every lake, but education can reach every boat operator. A strong requirement for boating safety education, in addition to better enforcement of wildlife protection laws and lake-specific horsepower and watercraft-type restrictions where necessary, can combine to create a much safer environment for loons and boaters alike.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy Hart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tracy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Hart".

Tracy Hart
Conservation Biologist
Maine Audubon