

Testimony to the Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Committee in favor of LD 1663, An Act To Improve Boating Safety on Maine Waters

Dear IF&W Committee Members,

I write today in support of the proposed Act to create a mandatory boating safety course for young people. It makes complete sense to me to mandate education focused on comprehensive safety and proper operation of watercraft. This will create the opportunity for young Maine boaters to more fully understand relevant rules as well as the implications of improper or insensitive boat operation for their own safety, the safety of other people, the safety and well-being of wildlife, and the integrity of shoreline structures and the shoreline itself. While this Act as currently written does not address boating education for older boaters, I wish there were a mechanism for that as well.

I think that the MDIFW mission of protecting and managing Maine's fish and wildlife and their habitats, promoting Maine's outdoor heritage, and safely connecting people with nature through responsible recreation, sport, and science is more likely to be fulfilled with greater education efforts, in this instance, directed towards the *responsibility* component of recreational boating.

I am encouraged by Colonel Scott's testimony indicating the state of current boater education going beyond safe boat operation to include other elements such as proper preparation & equipment, emergency response, and environmental concerns. I haven't had the chance to examine the course materials and syllabus for the available online courses on the IFW website, but hope that they do give adequate recognition to the effects of boat wakes on shoreline erosion, damage to shoreline property, and boat strikes of wildlife – particularly of loons, given the physiological limitations they have in getting out of the way of fast moving boats and the dark color and slow responses of young loon chicks. Setting and expanding the expectation that there may be other boaters in smaller, more vulnerable craft and wildlife to be careful around would be a worthy objective for all age boaters.

Perhaps there are education modules that are available or could be created (certainly for in person training) to incorporate what we know about specific needs and habits of some of our Maine wildlife. It is in the State's best interest to protect what makes Maine's water bodies special – having an overall low percentage of lakes and streams with aquatic invasive species, high water quality, and a diversity of wildlife who share these habitats with us.

Interactions with boaters from out of state at our Courtesy Boat Inspection (CBI) station on Long Pond on Mt. Desert Island speaks volumes about how special our water quality and aquatic habitats are because they tell us how degraded there's are by comparison. We don't want to be complacent and take that for granted, until it is too late.

While this is getting beyond the scope of the language of the proposed Act, I think it would be great to have Maine DEP CBI training and Lake Stewards of Maine aquatic invasive species training components to the offerings on the IFW boater education website page. Links to those resources, at least, would be easy to implement and the programs are already developed. With greater understanding of the specialness of the resources we have could come more responsible overall recreational boating behavior.

The dual mandate of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Department, like many state and federal land management/natural resource agencies of protecting and enhancing the resources it has been entrusted to manage by the citizens of the state; **and** providing for the enjoyment of people to pursue recreational activities connected with those natural resources is a tough balancing act, but comprehensive boater education is a sensible step to help achieve both goals.

Thank you for creating the opportunity to strengthen education efforts that can benefit all who live and play on, in, and around our precious lakes, ponds, and streams with LD 1663.

Sincerely,
Billy Helprin

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