



Testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

LD 2141, An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations

*Submitted to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee,
January 31, 2024*

Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and Distinguished Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee:

7 Lakes Alliance, a nonprofit organization committed to conserving the lands and waters of the Belgrade Lakes Region for all, fully supports *LD 2141, An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations*. This act will bolster funding for Invasive plant remediation efforts, reduce invasive plant fragments leaving heavily infested waters, and reduce the creation of invasive plant fragments within infestations. As a regional leader in invasive aquatic prevention, remediation, and education, each component of this bill has a significant impact on our operations. **We strongly recommend that you endorse LD 2141 with a unanimous “ought to pass.”**

Appropriation of \$2 million to address the most serious aquatic plant infestations

7 Lakes leads a robust invasive aquatic program that employs up to 40 seasonal courtesy boat inspectors (CBI) stationed across seven waterbodies and 6 SCUBA certified divers and survey crew members. 7 Lakes and our partners have spent over \$2 million managing invasive variable-leaf watermilfoil since it was discovered in Great Pond in 2010. Four of our seven lakes either have, or have previously had, invasive plant infestations. Since discovering a new infestation of curly-leaf pondweed in 2021, an additional \$80,000 has been spent on rapid response initiatives in North Pond and East Pond. 7 Lakes provides 20-80% cost-match to DEP grants on an annual basis, which puts significant financial strain on our members and fundraising partners, including our local municipalities.

While a one-time appropriation of \$2M would provide a significant boost in the short term, what is really needed is an annual ongoing appropriation on this order that would allow increased capacity state-wide. To put this number in perspective, consider that **Maine’s lakes support over 52,000 jobs and provide approximately \$4B economic activity annually in economic benefits to our State**. Most of the towns in our watershed receive 50-80% of their annual tax base from shorefront property, much of which is owned by non-residents. In the **Town of Rome, where I live, shorefront property taxes provide \$2M annually**, which pays virtually the entire education budget of the Town.

Strengthen Watercraft Inspection Protocols on Heavily Infested Waterbodies

Strong remediation efforts and extensive CBI coverage are the best way to ensure that no invasive plant fragments leave an infested waterbody. However, the financial burden to run these programs is significant and many smaller groups with limited fundraising capacity struggle to finance adequate lake protection protocols. Waterbodies with limited resources (CBI coverage and remediation efforts) are a threat to all Maine lakes as invasive plant fragments are allowed to generate and leave unmanaged infestations to create new infestations in other lakes. For example, CBIs removed 16 fragments of invasive milfoil from boats leaving Messalonskee Lake, which has one of the oldest milfoil infestations in the state, in 2023 alone. Allocating more funds, resources, and restrictions to severely infested waterbodies will benefit all Maine lakes by limiting further spread.

Review Policies and Procedures for Surface Use Restrictions

We credit a large part of our success in minimizing the generation and spread of variable-leaf milfoil fragments in Great Pond to a surface use restriction (SUR) granted by the commissioners of IFW and DEP which prevents motorized craft from entering our primary infestation in Great Meadow Stream. Since the SUR has been in effect, we have seen minimal spread of fragments outside of the restricted area. Great Meadow Stream remains a popular destination for paddlers and bird watching.

Considering the long-term financial commitment required to manage invasive aquatic organisms and the need to limit the spread outside of heavily infested waterbodies, **we urge you to support, and if possible, strengthen LD 2141**. Sharon Mann, our Invasives Aquatic Program Director, will present an abbreviated version of these remarks at the public hearing, and importantly, be available to answer any questions you may have about our invasive plant programs. Thank you for your important service to the State and thank you for trying to improve Maine's capacity to protect our lakes from invasive plants.

Sincerely



Peter L. Kallin, Ph.D.
Interim CEO, 7 Lakes Alliance
chair@7lakesalliance.org