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To: Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Date: January 31, 2024

Re: LD 2141, An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State

I write today in support of LD 2141 which aims to better protect Maine Lakes from invasive aquatic plant infestations.

There's nothing quite like the beauty of a Maine lake. My favorite place to be is at my camp on Echo Lake in central Maine. Specifically, in or on the water.

In addition to swimming and paddling and enjoying the loons and other critters, I coordinate the Echo Lake Invasive Plant Patrol. We are a team of around thirty trained volunteers who annually survey the entire shoreline and littoral zones of Echo Lake, Taylor Pond, and the Echo Outlet (Mill) Pond. These waterbodies are in the Kennebec County towns of Mt. Vernon, Fayette, and Readfield.

Last summer, as always, we were on the lookout for Maine's "Eleven Most Unwanted" aquatic plants that pose a threat to Maine lakes. In August we received the bad news that a twelfth invader, swollen bladderwort, had been discovered in our watershed, specifically in Tilton Pond.

We are fortunate that no invasive plants have yet been discovered in our lake and ponds. But we are well aware that for years other nearby lakes have been dealing with enormously disruptive infestations of several invasives, including variable-leaf milfoil, Eurasian water milfoil, and European frog-bit along with the newly discovered swollen bladderwort. All of these plants damage plant and animal communities, degrade fishing and other recreational activities, and lower property values. Infestations are exasperating and expensive to deal with, and efforts to eradicate the invaders can go on for decades with no guarantee of success.

Every nearby infestation is a threat to our lake and ponds. The public boat launch on Echo Lake is particularly vulnerable. Another team of Echo Lake volunteers, the Courtesy Boat Inspectors, take shifts on weekends in the summer educating visitors at the boat launch while inspecting boats for plant fragments that could cause trouble. Between our two teams, and with the help of area nonprofits like the Lake Stewards of Maine, 30 Mile River Association, 7 Lakes Alliance,

and Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed, we are doing our best to prevent infestations and provide early detection should an invasive take root. It's a huge effort, but not nearly as huge as what we would need to muster in the event of an actual invasive plant infestation.

LD 2141 provides much-needed resources so the state can better manage current infestations and strengthen the protocols around boat inspections to prevent the spread of invasive aquatic plants. These measures will decrease the opportunities for aggressive invaders to spread from infested lakes to others, like Echo, Taylor, and the Echo Mill Pond, that we are doing our best to protect.

Investing in prevention is common sense, and it makes fiscal sense, too.

Thank you for your consideration. Please vote Ought to Pass on LD 2141.