

Sal Girifalco
Norway
LD 171

Testimony in support of LD 171

My name is Sal Girifalco, President of the Lakes Association of Norway (LAON). Maine definitely needs to increase its efforts to protect its lakes from infestation caused by other Maine lakes so I support LD 171. A few years ago I was able to obtain 6 years of DEP data on inbound saves (where a CBI removed an invasive plant from a boat about to launch) that showed 72% of boats carrying an invasive last visited an infested Maine lake. So, while out of state boats do represent a threat, infested Maine waterbodies are by far the biggest threat to Maine waterbodies! This is where the state can exercise control over roughly three quarters of the problem. Maine should establish a goal of preventing the transportation of any invasive aquatic species out of any of Maine's infested lakes.

My concern is that everywhere in Maine, locally run and funded Courtesy Boat Inspection programs (CBI) are simultaneously both the primary, AND the last line of defense, but it is by no means enough. Most Maine Lakes do not have CBI, and those that do cannot have full coverage over the full boating season. CBI alone cannot adequately protect Maine's lakes. As evidence of this, when LAON started CBI in 2015, there were 24 infested waterbodies in Maine. Since then, seven have been taken off the list, but the total number is now 38. That means in 9 years there was a gain of 21 lakes that have become infested ($24 - 7 + 21 = 38$), or an 88% increase. It would be interesting to know the remediation costs of those seven delisted lakes.

It is sometimes said that we need more boater education. Well, there have been many attempts to influence boaters, and some have been reached. However, the 88% increase in lakes that became infested shows that the approach of CBI and education can help, but will not solve the problem. That rate of growth is frightening, and it will become exponential as the number of infested "feeder" lakes grows. Collectively, Maine DEP plus lake associations have spent millions of dollars trying to manage infested lakes, which has been absolutely necessary, but with the number of infestations and removal costs growing, it must be recognized that with the current, limited approach, we will lose this battle, and the war. It very likely that Maine will lose its status as a state with a relatively small invasive problem in the not-too-distant future. We need a way to greatly reduce the chances of a boat inadvertently transporting an invasive plant from one Maine lake to another, and we need it now. Consider the cost savings if by controlling Maine's infested lakes, the vast majority of new infestations were prevented!

If it takes until January 2026 to develop a plan, then a year of debate and hopefully approval, implementation could be 2 or more years away. Do we really have that luxury of time? I urge passage of this bill with an expectation of an expedited plan in a few months.

Thank you,
Sal Girifalco - LAON President