



Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 24, 2025

RE: LD 77, An Act to Stabilize and Sustainably Fund the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Fisheries and Hatcheries Division by Increasing the Inland Fishing License Fees and Establishing the Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement Fund

Dear Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Roberts, and Members of the IFW Committee:

My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon’s Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony neither for nor against LD 77, *An Act to Stabilize and Sustainably Fund the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Fisheries and Hatcheries Division by Increasing the Inland Fishing License Fees and Establishing the Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement Fund*.

Maine Audubon supports the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife’s (DIFW) efforts to advance the conservation and enhancement of native inland fisheries through increasing fishing license fees. However, as amended, it is our understanding that LD 77 does not explicitly direct funding to native fish conservation. We respectfully ask that this Committee dedicate a portion of fishing license fees to a new native fish conservation program, which would be detailed under *Title 12, Part 13, Subpart 2, Chapter 903, Supchapter 2, §10108. Programs* in order to forward the conservation, research, and management of freshwater fish species native to the State.

Maine is the last true stronghold in the East for wild Brook Trout, and has the only remaining populations of landlocked Arctic Charr and sea-run Atlantic Salmon. With the most extensive distribution, abundance, and habitat diversity of eastern Brook Trout within their native U.S. range, Maine’s wild Brook Trout waters represent a unique, valuable, and irreplaceable ecological resource. Unfortunately, a range of pressures including some forestry practices, development, dams, invasive species, and overfishing have compromised or destroyed wild fish and their habitat across their range. Brook Trout and Arctic Charr are sensitive species that require clean, cold waters and are intolerant to changes in habitat. Some of the largest threats to Brook Trout include: the introduction of non-native species, such as predatory sportfish and popular competing baitfish; adjacent land use practices that

influence hydrology, physical habitat, water temperature, water quality, and input of organic and woody material; and limited connectivity caused by dams and inadequate culverts that frequently prevent movement between important habitats (this has been identified as the primary threat to recovery of Atlantic Salmon). Because Maine is at the northern edge of the lower 48's Brook Trout, Arctic Charr, and Atlantic Salmon's range, and still has a relatively undeveloped landscape with thousands of intact lakes, ponds, and streams, Maine's watersheds are predicted to be some of the most resistant to climate change. Maine waters are therefore essential to sustaining these species and opportunities to fish for them. Through proper identification and regulation, and proactive conservation and restoration measures, these waters can be protected, reconnected, and restored so these heritage fish can thrive in the future.

With both the help of the fee increase proposed in LD 77 and specific language directing funding to a new native fish conservation and enhancement program, there are a suite of initiatives the state would be better positioned to pursue alongside a range of partners, including: surveying remote ponds and coastal streams for Brook Trout; prioritizing high quality habitat, such as cold water refugia, for conservation; restoring degraded habitat by adding downed wood into streams to create feeding, resting, and nursery areas; understanding the influence of adjacent land use activities on habitat suitability; protecting shoreland habitat; and reconnecting fragmented waterways by removing dams and using Stream Smart practices.

With the suggested additions, this legislation would allow DIFW and conservation partners to more adequately address inland fisheries conservation issues and protect our ecological and recreational heritage. **We respectfully encourage the Committee to support this bill with the suggested additions.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy