

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST L.D. 1826

“An Act To Create a Subcommittee of the Interagency Task Force on Invasive Aquatic Plants and Nuisance Species To Recommend Ways To Reduce the Threat of Further Infestations”

SPONSORED BY: Representative HASENFUS of Readfield

CO-SPONSORED BY: Representative WARREN of Hallowell.

DATE OF HEARING: January 10, 2022

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the Environment and Natural Resource Committee. I am Francis Brautigam, Fisheries Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, neither for nor against **L.D. 1826**.

This bill directs the Commissioner of Environmental Protection to establish a subcommittee of members of the Interagency Task Force on Invasive Aquatic Plants and Nuisance Species and other persons with relevant experience or expertise in order to make findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation, regarding the prevention and management of invasive aquatic threats. Beginning December 15, 2022, the task force is required to report biennially to the department and the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over environment and natural resources matters. The committee is authorized to report out legislation relating to the report.

Preventing the introduction of all invasive aquatic organisms (including invertebrates, fish, pathogens, as well as plants, etc.) that threaten the ecology of Maine waters remains an important issue for my agency; one that is also shared by many nongovernmental organization partners, and our colleagues at the Department of Environmental Protection. Invasive fish introductions remain one of the greatest threats to conserving our most vulnerable native fish communities, including brook trout, landlocked salmon, and Arctic charr. These native resources not only provide popular angling opportunities, but also important economic and cultural benefits. In an effort to reduce the risk from and to manage new infestations, the department has promulgated numerous laws,

permitting/licensing/registration programs, response procedures that includes one of the only invasive fish eradication programs in the northeast, provided enforcement compliance through warden service, as well as initiated outreach campaigns. Many of the highly successful preventative programs administered by the Department of Environmental Protection, including the funding of Courtesy Boat Inspection Programs are highly visible to the public. However, some of the preventative and management programs administered by the MDIFW are less well known, as they are often less visible to the general public but are no less important in managing invasive threats.

The Department works very closely with MDEP on coordinating preventative and management efforts directed at all invasive aquatic organisms consistent with both agency's areas of jurisdiction. Since many of the pathways for infestation are similar for both plants and animals, there is a mutual shared benefit and efficiency realized by engaging in a high level of interagency collaboration, as well as exploring meaningful partnerships with vested nongovernmental organizations.

Maine is fortunate to have relatively few invasive plant infestations and is also blessed with the last stronghold of native brook trout in the eastern United States, justifying continued investments to reduce new infestations, which is the intent of LD 1826. Both state agencies share an overarching objective to reduce the likelihood of new infestations as much as possible and respond rapidly to eradicate and limit spread, particularly where threats pose the greatest risks. Existing state programs have prevented infestations and successfully eradicated invasive aquatic plant and fish infestations around the state. While we can't prevent or eradicate all infestations, we need to be vigilant in exploring new and emerging approaches to provide useful tools to manage risks in such a very water-rich state that supports many water-based public use opportunities important to Maine's economy and quality of life.

Current ongoing efforts by the agencies working in partnership with a broad group of stakeholders, including lake associations, water districts, the angling community, marine trade, and watershed management organizations are focused on improving risk reduction efforts under what is referred to as the Clean, Drain, Dry work group. While this active, regularly convening group is focused on the development of a new aquatic invasive public awareness and risk reduction campaign, the actual scope of work embodied by the committee's goals and objectives are even more comprehensive, and consistent with LD 1826. Furthermore, this diverse group is composed of talented, passionate individuals with considerable expertise in all areas needed to navigate the challenges and complexity of managing aquatic invasive threats. I believe this broad stakeholder group provides the capacity to address risk reduction concerns highlighted in LD 1826.

I can answer any question you may have today and will also be available to discuss further at the work session.