

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE**

**IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 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”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative WOOD of Greene.

DATE OF HEARING: February 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Judy Camuso, Commissioner of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of L.D. 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.

Since the submission of this bill, the Department has had some very meaningful discussions with a number of stakeholders and have prepared the amendment that you have before you. The amendment removes language establishing a dedicated account (Other Special Revenue) of which the fishing license increase would be deposited.

Instead, we have an initiative in the budget that establishes a new general fund account “*Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement*” with an appropriation of \$1,224,000 in FY/26 and \$1,224,000 in FY/27 to be used by the Department for the conservation and enhancement of inland freshwater fisheries resources. We are also modifying the amounts in which each category of fishing license will increase, the chart below provides those amounts.

A second initiative supported by this revenue is a capital equipment request for fisheries and hatcheries \$244,835 in FY/26 and \$234,705 in FY/27. A third initiative in the Biennial Budget supported by this revenue increase establishes an additional position in the boating access program as well as \$150,000 in additional funding for boat launch facility maintenance and enhancement.

With these license fee changes approximately \$1,974,000 of anticipated revenue will be provided to the State’s General Fund. The requested increase will support previously mentioned general fund budget initiatives.

Approximately \$500,000 of this \$1,974,000 a year will be deposited into the Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund by allocating \$2 of the sale of each fishing license to this fund. We are also requesting to modify language within the existing Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund to broaden the use of the fund and utilize the \$2, previously mentioned, to support the Department’s existing (8) hatcheries and provide support for any future hatchery expansion. This portion of the amendment that broadens the use of the Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund conflicts with the Department’s bill LD 76 which can be addressed during the work session on that bill.

LD 77 supports Maine’s fisheries that are unique not only in the northeast but in the country. With over 6,000 lakes and ponds and 32,000 miles of rivers and streams, we are well known as

the last stronghold for Maine's eastern brook trout, and the only state in the lower 48 with native Arctic charr populations. Maine's waters attract hundreds of thousands of anglers each year, including over 275,000 from Maine, and others from throughout the country and beyond.

Maine's fisheries contribute nearly \$400 million to Maine's economy according to a 2014 study, supporting many small businesses such as tackle shops, general stores, guide services, sporting camps, restaurants and more. Many of these businesses are located in rural Maine, where other economic opportunities are limited.

Maine's fishing license is currently one of the least expensive in the country, tied for the 11th lowest nationwide. For the work session I will provide details of where our license fees compare at the regional and national level. The last fishing license increase (\$4) was implemented in 2010 as part of a broader across-the-board increase for all of our licenses.

The Department, and specifically our fisheries program, has been well supported by the legislature through the general fund budget process, but costs have continued to climb, and even with this support we have had to scale back our fisheries programs to cover our costs. During a time when Maine's climate is changing, this request will allow us to enhance our conservation efforts including reestablishing dedicated research programs, restoration and enhancement of habitat, and increased collaboration with partners.

Maine's most iconic species are extremely susceptible to climate change. The license increase will allow for the necessary investments to help alleviate these impacts of climate change on our native and sport fisheries, including managing droughts and severe storm events and their impacts on fish and fish habitats, identifying and protecting thermal refuge areas and spawning habitats, and monitoring and battling changes in Maine's lakes and streams. The specifics of this enhanced effort are identified in the publicly derived 2021 Fisheries and Hatcheries Strategic Management Plan, and the Maine Wildlife Action Plan.

This amendment additionally supports the future of our (8) state fish hatcheries that stock over 1 million fish to our inland waters each year for our resident anglers and visitors to enjoy. Our hatchery infrastructure has been historically well supported by general fund appropriations, state infrastructure bonds, and most recently over \$27M in Maine Jobs Recovery funding. Providing \$2 from each fishing license sold will continue this path forward upgrading our hatchery effluent and providing a foundation for the future possibility of a new hatchery in Maine to support Arctic charr and lake whitefish.

Lastly, this request directly supports anglers and others who enjoy boating in Maine. As I previously mentioned one of the initiatives will increase funding in the 26/27 budget initiative to create a new position and provide additional maintenance funds in the Boating Access Program. This enhances our boating access program to support federal requirements to maintain property boundaries and encroachments at our 180 water access sites across the state, as well as address deferred maintenance and future acquisition.

In summary, the fishing license increase is a direct benefit to fisheries conservation, Maine's fish hatcheries, and water access, for everyone that enjoys our rich fisheries resources and resilience measures that we must undertake to protect and enhance our native and sport fisheries. Additionally, this has a broader benefit to everyone in the state and is part of keeping our outdoor recreational economy strong.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.

L.D. 77 increases the fee for all inland fishing licenses as follows:

License Type	Current Cost	Proposed Increase	Proposed Cost
Non-Resident Season Fishing	\$64	\$19	\$83
1-Day Fishing	\$11	\$7	\$18
3-Day Fishing	\$23	\$7	\$30
Non-Resident 7-Day Fishing	\$43	\$19	\$62
Non-Resident 15-Day Fishing	\$47	\$19	\$66
Non-Resident Comb. Hunt. & Fish.	\$150	\$19	\$169
Resident Season Fishing	\$25	\$5	\$30