

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

**In Opposition to L.D. 940**

**“An Act to Increase Cash Prizes for Fishing Derbies”**

**Presented by:** Representative ALBERT of Madawaska.

**Cosponsored by:** Senator BERNARD of Aroostook and Representatives: ARDELL of Monticello,  
BABIN of Fort Fairfield, DAIGLE of Fort Kent, GUERRETTE of Caribou, MASON of Lisbon,  
SWALLOW of Houlton.

**DATE OF HEARING: Monday, March 17, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Liz Latti, Fisheries and Hatcheries Director for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), speaking on behalf of the Department in opposition to L.D. 940.

As proposed, this bill makes a change to the provisions authorizing the adoption of rules governing fishing derbies to provide that the maximum cash prize that may be awarded at each derby be increased to \$50,000.

The current statute, 12 MRSA Section 12504 (3) states the commissioner shall adopt all necessary rules relative to permits to ensure that derbies are conducted only at such times and places and in such a manner as are consistent with the fisheries management objectives of the department. This includes fixing the maximum total value of prizes that may be awarded at each derby, except that for a derby held on Sebago Lake in Cumberland County and in conjunction with the department's fisheries management objectives, the maximum total value of prizes may not exceed \$100,000.

Currently, MDIFW Rule Chapter 2 states: *“The total cash value of prizes to be awarded at any single fishing derby (excluding door prizes) shall not exceed \$10,000, except:*

*When the derby is of a regional or statewide nature, involves more than a single body of water, or only involves waters not managed by the department for cold water fish species (trout, salmon and/or togue), in which case the total cash value of prizes to be awarded (excluding door prizes) shall not exceed \$25,000.”*

The cap on fishing derby prizes is designed to limit the number of anglers and manage angling pressure on our finite natural resources. It recognizes that fisheries are a public resource meant for everyone to use and enjoy, and are not intended for the profit or benefit of any single organization or group. MDIFW feels the current rule is set at a reasonable amount and allowing the prize amount to exceed \$10,000 (or \$25,000 when meeting certain criteria as established in rule) creates unbalanced use of a limited resource.

Derbies focus an intense amount of fishing pressure on one body of water on one day or weekend, and regional biological staff receive complaints from the public that the quality of fishing decreases after the derby, presumably due to increased pressure and excessive harvest. Maine Warden Service receives complaints associated with derbies from increasing landowner conflicts, litter, and reports of fishing violations. Many anglers and camp owners want to limit or eliminate ice fishing derbies. In situations where the waterway is stocked by the department, many people feel that the derbies unfairly remove fish that belong to everyone in order to benefit a small group.

The department requires an application for each derby. Due to the increased angling pressure and higher fish harvest associated with these events, the department collaborates with derby organizers to structure prizes and prize categories that help limit the harvest of certain species and/or establish minimum size limits above current regulations. These measures are intended to protect species from overharvest and ensure consistent recreational fishery for the public throughout the remainder of the fishing season. However, even with these safeguards, we are unable to limit the number of participants. Increasing a derby's cash prize will likely attract more participants, which in turn will raise both the pressure on the fishery and the overall harvest.

Larger cash prizes attract more anglers, necessitating a larger law enforcement presence to ensure compliance with licenses and fishing regulations, while also removing wardens from other waters and duties such as snowmobile enforcement to focus on the derby. Depending on location of a derby and the amenities and parking that is available, derbies can result in public safety concerns and require not only increased warden service presence but local police departments as well. Warden service prepares for larger derbies with increasing available resources at an event, including staging rescue equipment such as air boats and other equipment, increased warden coverage, and special details.

While the area that the fishing derby is located within may see an increased economic impact for that day or weekend due to the increased pressure, anglers who may normally fish that water tend to stay away after the derby, decreasing economic activity.

In summary, this bill would place an undue burden on the department and public resources. The department believes the current rules for fishing derby prizes are adequate, considering the state's highly valued resources and the often-limited infrastructure surrounding Maine's lakes and ponds.

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