

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

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE**

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 221

“An Act Regarding Airboat Noise”

Presented by Representative HEPLER of Woolwich.

Cosponsored by Representatives: ANKELES of Brunswick, ARFORD of Brunswick, DILL of Old Town, GOLEK of Harpswell, LANDRY of Farmington, O'CONNELL of Brewer, SACHS of Freeport.

DATE OF HEARING: May 8, 2023

Good morning Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Warden Lt. Jason Luce, of the Maine Warden Service, speaking on behalf of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, in support of **L.D. 221**.

During the 130th Legislature, LD 1873 extended the sunset on the existing decibel limits for airboats from September 30, 2022 to September 30, 2023. It also reconvened the stakeholder working group that has been discussing the noise associated with airboat operations. That group was directed to report back to this committee with any recommendations by January 3, 2024, and the committee has the ability to report out a bill to the Second Regular Session of the 131st Legislature.

As you have heard from the progress report provided by Lt. Luce and Sgt Dean, the working group has continued to meet to evaluate the success of the existing decibel limits in ameliorating concerns from riparian landowners and to consider other actions. The group met in July, August, and November of 2022, and March and April of 2023. At their most recent meeting, the working group considered either extending the timeframe of the existing decibel limits or removing the sunset provision so that the decibel limits remain in effect indefinitely. Ultimately, the group reached consensus to recommend extending the timeframe, rather than removing the sunset provision.

The additional time provided by the extension will allow DMR and IFW to continue to monitor noise levels from airboats and the effectiveness of the current limits. In the event that any violations for exceeding the decibel limits are issued, it will also allow the evaluation of the enforceability of these decibel limits, which has not yet been tested.

Concurrently, the working group has determined that educating airboat operators regarding best practices to reduce unnecessary noise would also provide benefits. To that end, they have sent a letter to all individuals who have registered an airboat, in hopes that some additional information in advance of summer might further mitigate any complaints. Specifically, the letter advised on the following points:

- Adjusting the blades on the prop to a lesser pitch to reduce noise level;
- Having a muffler in good working condition; and
- Keeping RPMs lower by idling in rivers and coves in the early morning hours, especially in more populous areas.

In closing, the working group has been striving to find solutions that will allow airboats to continue to operate as part of Maine's working waterfront, while reducing noise and concerns from riparian landowners. While this has at times been a difficult balance, the situation is improving, and will continue to do so as more is learned about effective strategies to reduce conflict.

By extending the existing sunset, LD 221 provides additional time for the working group to continue its efforts without the decibel limits being eliminated. For this reason, the Department asks you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 221. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.