

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

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

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 700

**“Resolve, to Direct the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Examine the
Northern Pike Population in Sabattus Pond”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative Randall Greenwood of Wales (by Request)

DATE OF HEARING: April 19, 2023

Good afternoon Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Francis Brautigam, Fisheries Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 700**.

This resolve directs the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to examine the northern pike population in Sabattus Pond and submit a report, which may include a recommended fisheries management plan for Sabattus Pond, to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than December 6, 2023.

Northern pike are listed as an invasive species in the Department’s new 15-year Fisheries Strategic Management Plan, as well as the State of Maine Action Plan for Managing Invasive Aquatic Species. Both plans were developed using a stakeholder process.

Invasive species are one of the leading threats to conserving Maine’s native sport and nonsport fish as outlined in the Department’s 15-year strategic fisheries management plan and the State Wildlife Action Plan. As an invasive species, northern pike are not afforded any special protections statewide to enhance their sport fish value or their popularity, as that could encourage even more unauthorized introductions to new waters.

Because there is a locally popular winter fishery for pike on Sabattus Pond there may be a perception that pike are highly sought by recreational anglers, however, the results of a 2016 angler survey (MAINE ANGLERS’ PARTICIPATION IN AND OPINIONS ON FRESHWATER FISHING SURVEY), indicated that northern pike were identified as the most preferred sportfish by only 3% of ice anglers (similar to white perch & black

crappie), and less than 1% most preferred by open water anglers (similar to black crappie & yellow perch).

Northern Pike have been illegally introduced into 39 lakes and ponds and their presence in Maine is in direct conflict with the Department's mission to protect and conserve fisheries that are native and very popular, including brook trout, landlocked Atlantic salmon, and arctic charr. Northern pike are at the top of the fisheries food chain and have a life history that outcompetes every life stage of our native coldwater fish; they spawn earlier than any freshwater fish, they also produce more eggs and young, and grow faster. Given the statewide threat they pose, Department resources are not used to protect, conserve, enhance or promote these invasive threats. Any efforts by the Department to popularize, promote, or enhance their sportfish value would be viewed by the public as condoning their presence, encouraging additional unauthorized introductions by the public. Where possible the Department strives to prevent their spread, limit their presence, and limit public interest.

Redirecting limited Department resources away from the conservation and enhancement of native and more highly preferred sportfish actively managed by the Department to explore opportunities to enhance an invasive fishery as suggested in this bill is inconsistent with direction established in the Department's statewide strategic fisheries management plan to protect native fish from invasive species.

In 2017 the Department assessed the status of the invasive pike population in Sabattus Pond to document population changes over time. This recent study was conducted for a very different purpose than identified in this bill, but the collected information supports what is essentially requested in this bill.

The Department does not require any additional information on the Sabattus Pond pike to inform the development of a fishery management plan as requested in this bill; the Department's current and recommended management plan is no action to conserve, enhance, or promote this unwelcome invasive threat in Maine and where possible prevent their spread and limit their presence. This approach is consistent with the Department's 15-year Strategic Fisheries Management Plan and is consistent with agency communications to the public regarding the Department's management of northern pike as an invasive species in Maine.

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