

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST
L.D. 235**

**“An Act To Increase Funding To Contain and Manage the Spread of
Invasive Aquatic Species”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative RISEMAN of Harrison

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator MIRAMANT of Knox
Senator CARSON of Cumberland
Representative ACKLEY of Monmouth
Representative FAY of Raymond
Representative PEBWORTH of Blue Hill
Representative PLUECKER of Warren
Representative SYLVESTER of Portland

DATE OF HEARING: February 27, 2019

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Judy Camuso, Commissioner of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), speaking on behalf of the Department, neither for nor against **L.D. 235**.

LD 235 proposes Lake and River Protection sticker fee increases that are progressively phased every 2 years, starting in 2020, and ending with the last increase in 2024. MDIFW has administered the sale of Lake and River Protection stickers since the program was implemented in 2002. The sticker is required to launch a motorized boat on Maine’s inland waters.

The program stemmed from concerns of invasive plants in our inland waters, which are often highly visible and impactful to water based recreation activities. The concern of plant infestations received strong grass root support from lakeside communities to establish a funding mechanism to prevent further infestations, and manage existing infestations. Unfortunately, the host of aquatic invasive threats have increased and they are not just limited to plants. They include nonindigenous fish like northern pike that

threaten Maine's native wild brook trout, and various exotic mussels like zebra mussels that can affect the health and suitability of our waters for native fish and wildlife. Invasive invertebrates including various exotic crayfish and spiny water fleas that can alter water quality and disrupt the natural food web. Because the invasive threats to waters of the state have increased, the discussion and concerns regarding the need for increased preventative measures has also broadened.

Traditionally the Department of Environmental Protection(MDEP) has focused on invasive plants and MDIFW has focused on both plants and fish, but increased awareness by both agencies recognize the need for increased collaboration to support a more comprehensive approach to protecting Maine's water from the growing range of aquatic threats, beyond just plants.

Currently MDEP receives 80% of the Lake and River Protection revenues and 20% are directed to be managed by the MDIFW. MDEP places a strong emphasis on programs preventing new infestations, and mitigating existing ones. MDEP funds are provided to various groups, including lake associations, to suppress infestations and fund courtesy boat inspection programs around the state. MDIFW funds are primarily used for enforcement with a small allotment to licensing for purchasing stickers, to fisheries for outreach on invasive fish issues, and our safety programs for outreach in hunter education programs.

The current funding split was enacted in 2014, the previous distribution was 60% MDEP and 40% MDIFW. The 20% reduction to MDIFW had a primary effect on the amount of education and enforcement effort by the Department. The Warden Service reduced effort directly dedicated to invasive plant enforcement such as highway checkpoints and inspections at boat ramps. Enforcement for invasive plants continues to be part of routine fishing and boating compliance checks. For MDIFW the reduction in funding has caused an overall scaled down version of the invasive plant efforts that were part of the original program in 2002.

We are prepared to work with this Committee and MDEP to address the concerns brought forth in this bill.

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