

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

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

In Opposition to L.D. 173

“An Act to Exempt Certain Watercraft from Registration Requirements”

Sponsored by Representative WOOD of Greene.

Cosponsored by Representatives: DRINKWATER of Milford, MASON of Lisbon, THORNE of Carmel.

DATE OF HEARING: February 10, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Dan Scott, Colonel of the Maine Warden Service, speaking on behalf of the Department, as well as the Department of Environmental Protection, (MDEP) in opposition to L.D. 173 An Act to Exempt Certain Watercraft from Registration Requirements.

As proposed, this bill would exempt canoes, kayaks and rowboats having a manufacturer’s horsepower rating less than 100 Hp from the requirement of obtaining a certificate of number from the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. This certificate of number, commonly known as a boat registration number, allows for watercraft identification that assists with enforcement action for watercraft involved in unsafe or illegal activities. Registration also creates an avenue for education on safe practices and boating regulation compliance, and the Department’s Information & Education Division regularly sends relevant information and targeted campaigns to the boating public through traditional media, social media, and targeted emails.

In addition, the Lake and River Protection fee that is collected along with the boat registration fee provides funding for programs within the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) and the MDEP. Since 2002, the Lake and River Protection sticker has been required for all motorized watercraft operating on inland waters and funds the prevention, control and eradication of invasive species infestations, which are usually associated with human activities and carried by boats, trailers and associated equipment.

Exempting all canoes, kayaks, and rowboats equipped with a motor of 100 horsepower or less will lead to a significant reduction in revenue. This exemption would result in the removal of approximately 3,800 motorized canoe and kayak registrations, in addition to nearly 28,000 motorized rowboats (open motorboats).

When a resident registers a motorboat at their town office it triggers several revenue streams. The town charges the registrant an excise tax based on an estimated value of the boat (not unlike your MV excise tax). For first time boat registrants, the town also collects sales tax, which is ultimately distributed (through the MOSES system) to the state's general fund. The registrant pays the fee to register the motorboat, and if that motorboat is going to be used on inland waters it includes an additional Lake and River Protection program fee.

The revenue from the resident motorboat registration fee is first broken down to cover administrative costs for the Department's Division of Licensing and Registration (\$2.59 per registration). The remainder is distributed to the State General Fund to be appropriated as follows: 75% to the MDIFW and 25% to the Department of Marine Resources.

As noted above, the resident registrations of a motorboat used on inland waters also includes the fee associated with the Lake and River Protection program. This Lake and River Protection program fee generates revenue that is credited 30% to the MDIFW and 70% to MDEP for invasive species prevention and control.

Nonresidents motorboats which are registered in another state have reciprocity with Maine. So, visiting boaters are not required to register their motorboats in Maine. However, they must still purchase the Lake and River Protection sticker separately if operating on inland waters.

Fees that support aquatic invasive species prevention and control program recently saw an increase to \$25 that began January 1, 2025 and will see an additional \$10 increase, up to \$35 will begin on January 1, 2028. This is up from the prior \$15 fee and is a result of Public Law 2023 Chapter 612. While MDIFW and MDEP jointly testified neither for nor against on L.D. 1342 and recognize that the increased fee may disproportionately impact owners of multiple small, motorized watercraft, both Departments have expanded the scope of their invasive aquatic species programs for the upcoming years due to the increase in revenue. Since the law passed, our agency has been building this program and any change to that would impact our ability to meet the expectations set by the Legislature.

MDIFW consulted with MDEP and if the bill passed the biggest impact on their agency would be the reduced revenue from the Lake and River Protection fee. The MDEP's AIS Program conducted a strategic planning process in 2023-24 that identified goals including increasing support to lake groups, expanding program reach to areas of the state with little prevention and plant survey activity, limiting new invasive aquatic plant infestations, and strengthening the response to infestations. The approved revenue increases will fortify the boat inspection program, measures to detect invasive aquatic plants before they become established, and State and lake association efforts to manage existing infestations of invasive plants. The increases will also allow additional program support to areas like Rangeley, Moosehead, the County, and Downeast with currently limited capacity to prevent, detect and respond to infestations.

In addition to the loss of revenue for the MDIFW and the MDEP, the Maine Warden Service also receives a grant through the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Recreational Boating Safety Program, that in part is allocated as a function of the number of registered vessels within the state. Typically, we register between 120,000 – 124,000 motorboats each year. The proposed bill would cause an approximate 26% reduction in the number of registered vessels within the state that would be considered for grant allocation from the USCG Recreational Boating Safety Program. This would be another significant reduction in revenue for the agency, specifically for boating enforcement.

*Note – (The 26% is a rough estimate based on USCG data for motorboat types which only capture the length of the boat and do not reflect the horsepower which is how Maine determines the cost of the registration. The figure was based upon boats <14' (rowboats) in length and registered as less than 100 Hp.)

Registration Fees (*Fee includes the registration, Lake and River Protection fee, and the \$1.00 agent fee.) This does not include sales tax or excise tax that may be charged.

A portion of each inland boat registration fee goes to the Lake and River protection program to help protect Maine's waters from aquatic invasive species.

Watercraft	Inland Waters	Tidal Waters
0-10 Horsepower Motor	\$41	\$16
11-50 Horsepower Motor	\$46	\$21
51-115 Horsepower Motor	\$52	\$27
Over 115 Horsepower Motor	\$60	\$35
Personal Watercraft	\$60	\$35

In Summary:

This bill creates a substantial reduction in revenue that is impactful in a multitude of ways, by a reduction in the boat registration fee itself (that impacts MDIFW, MDMR and MDEP), the associated Lake and River Protection fee (that impacts both MDIFW, MDEP, towns and Lake Associations), not to mention the fiscal impact to towns in the form of excise tax and the state sales tax.

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



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