

Testimony in SUPPORT LD 646, Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Study Unregulated Storm Water Pollution

Submitted to Environment and Natural Resources Committee

March 3, 2025



Good afternoon, Chair Tepler, Chair Doudera, and Distinguished Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 6,000 supporters, followers, and volunteers, including thousands of members who belong to our 95 member Lake Associations. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality and habitat, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to speak in support of LD 646.

Stormwater pollution is one of the biggest risks to lake health. That risk is growing as the climate changes and lakes become less resilient to stormwater impacts. More frequent and intense storms bring larger volumes of stormwater carrying phosphorus-laden sediment into Maine's lakes. Best Management Practices to manage stormwater that may have worked in the past may lose their effectiveness as stormwater volume increases. The many small sources of non-point source pollution from many small properties can add together across a watershed to create damaging impacts to our lakes.

Excess phosphorus from non-point source pollution contributes to declines in water quality and clarity, degradation of lake habitat for fish and wildlife, and excessive algae growth or "blooms." Algal blooms turn lake water thick, green, and smelly. They are exacerbated by warmer water and air temperatures, and are detrimental to lake communities, local economies, the outdoor recreation and boating industries, and anglers, and can pose potential health risks for people and pets.

We applaud the work the Department of Environmental Protection has done over the last year to engage a stakeholder group and a technical committee around Chapter 500 rules. Those groups have made substantial progress in identifying knowledge gaps, data needs, and potential rule revisions. I will note that Maine Lakes has not been a part of these groups, but we have appreciated access to meeting minutes to allow us to follow their progress.

Topics to be considered by the Commission that would be created by LD 646 builds upon this prior work and includes many areas of concern that are specific to protecting the future of Maine's lakes, including consideration of stormwater regulations for lots under one acre in size and the need to identify and properly regulate stormwater in sensitive and threatened regions and watersheds. A formal Commission will build upon important work that has already been started to identify priority policies, tools, and barriers, such as staffing and financial resources, that are needed for reducing stormwater impacts.

The goal of LD 646 is to improve stormwater protections which is essential not just for urban and highly developed areas but also for the health and resilience of our rural lake communities. To better protect public health, essential habitats, outdoor recreation resources, and commercially important species, we urge you to vote in support of this bill.