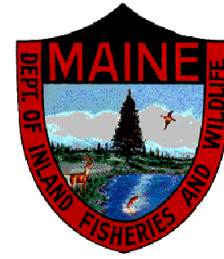




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June 17, 2011

Nathan Poore  
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By way of introduction, my name is Francis Brautigam and I'm the Regional Fishery Biologist for the Sebago Lake Management Region, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW). The purpose of this letter is to inform you of a matter that will likely result in the cancellation of existing Department stocking programs on Highland Lake.

The Maine Department of Conservation (MDOC) public boat launch (hand-carry only) does not offer a level of public access for trailered boats afforded those who reside on this well developed 630 acre lake, where large watercraft are prevalent. This inequity is inconsistent with the MDIFW's current policies on stocking and access that were established to ensure that the public has reasonable and equitable access to utilize fish that are raised and stocked using sportsmen's license dollars. The MDIFW has been aware of this inconsistency, but recent scrutiny by Representative Stephen Wood (Town of Sabbathus) has elevated the level of concern. I offer additional discussion and clarification of the issues below.

The public hand-carry boat launch on Highland Lake in Westbrook was constructed by MDOC in 1976. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife prompted the access initiative in response to complaints from anglers who were denied access to the Highland Lake. It appears that several sites were investigated for the launch site, and there is information in the file to indicate the MDIFW requested the development of access to accommodate 18-foot trailered boats. Apparently local opposition to the development of a trailered boat launch resulted in a decision to construct a hand-carry access.

During the 1970's the MDIFW's policy on stocking and public access was reflected in comments communicated by then Regional Fishery Biologist Stu DeRoche. In various related correspondence Stu indicated, "the Department only requires a public way to the lake where the public can get to the lake to fish...such that all people wishing to gain access can do so without trespassing". The development of a hand-carry launch was apparently consistent with the policy at that time to justify stocking.

The Department's current (2009) written policy on stocking and public access reads as follows:

**H4.1 Stocking Public Waters (January, 2009)**

***The Department stocks fish to provide fishing opportunities that would not otherwise be available. Fish culture in Maine is limited to salmonid species (trout and salmon). Warm water species, such as bass, pickerel and perch are prolific and can sustain their populations without stocking.***

***The Department stocks public waters to benefit the general fishing public, not just those who own shore frontage on the waters of the State. Therefore, the Department will not stock waters that lack reasonable and equitable public access. The following factors will be considered in determining if reasonable and equitable public access exists:***

- ***Size and type of watercraft in common use,***

- *Type of available access for those that reside on the lake shore (public access should be at least similar to, but no less than that available to shoreline residents),*
- *Availability of safe and adequate parking,*
- *Size of the water,*
- *Juxtaposition to human population centers,*
- *Current and future potential use,*
- *Kind of fishing opportunities in common use (present & potential),*
- *Seasonal fishery management focus*
- *Existing shoreline development,*
- *Availability of existing access for use by the general public (considering use fees, hours of operation, residency/affiliation requirements, and other potential limitations/restrictions).*

Current policy strives to establish water access and launching opportunities consistent with the watercraft in common use on the pond, so as to create safe and equitable boating and angling opportunities for those who visit public waters of the state. It is very apparent (based on a number of factors including observed prevalent use of larger motorized boats on the lake) the access available to those who visit the lake (MDOC's launch) is dissimilar to those who reside on the lake. The MDIFW concurs with Representative Stephen Wood's contention that there is a lack of reasonable and equitable access to Highland Lake, with regard to MDIFW stocking policy, and as such justifies suspension of MDIFW stocking programs.

The Department has been stocking Highland Lake since the 1930's, although programs and fisheries management focus has changed over time. Changes in fisheries management reflect changes in management opportunity, including historical lake water quality. Highland is currently stocked with 500 fall yearling brown trout, 150 fall yearling landlocked Atlantic salmon, and 30 adult landlocked Atlantic salmon. As with management stocking programs, stocking policies have also evolved as scrutiny over the use of limited Department resources has increased.

It appears that the existing MDOC hand-carry launch site could be physically modified to support use by trailered boats, as initial plans in the 1970's were to develop the site for trailered boats. Furthermore, recent information on early season water depths and wildlife issues have also been investigated and do not appear to be obstacles to modifying the hand carry launch to accommodate smaller trailered boats. While the option to modify the launch has not been thoroughly investigated it will not likely receive additional attention at this time unless the Town is interested and supportive of this option. Furthermore, in the absence of support from the Town to resolve the inconsistency the MDIFW will be obligated to suspend stocking. I hope there is Town support so the Department may continue to actively manage this public resource.

Please let me know if I can offer any additional clarification or information in regards to stocking or improving public access opportunities at the MDOC launch.



Francis Brautigam  
Regional Fisheries Biologist  
Sebago Lake Region

cc: George Powell, MDOC  
John Boland, MDIFW  
Peter Bourque, MDIFW  
Joe Dembeck, MDIFW  
Representative Stephen Wood  
Colleen Hilton, Mayor of Westbrook  
Tony Plante, Windham Town Manager