

OPPOSE

LD 219 – An Act To Amend the Laws Governing Shoreland Zoning.

Sponsor: Senator Lois Snowe-Mello

Co-sponsors: Senators COLLINS of York, McCORMICK of Kennebec, SAVIELLO of Franklin, THIBODEAU of Waldo; and THOMAS of Somerset, and Representatives DAVIS of Sangerville, MALABY of Hancock, McKANE of Newcastle, and O'CONNOR of Berwick

Summary: This bill reduces the width of land that is subject to shoreland zoning from 250 feet to 75 feet from the normal high-water line or upland edge of any coastal body of water, lake, river or wetland.

Explanation: Maine's Shoreland Zoning Law was enacted in the early 1970's as awareness was growing about the threat of development to our water resources. The law is based in part on a large body of scientific research that unequivocally shows that vegetated forest "buffers" effectively remove and treat a wide range of pollutants in stormwater runoff from developed areas. Vegetated buffers are highly effective in reducing phosphorus and sediment pollution through a combination of physical processes (e.g. settling, infiltration, physical entrapment of soil particles) and biochemical processes (e.g. adsorption of phosphorus and silt particles through infiltration of runoff in the soil). Vegetated buffers also reduce the occurrence of downstream soil erosion, thereby providing a double level of protection to water resources.

Generally speaking, the larger the buffer, the more protection offered to a waterbody. Drastically reducing the shoreland zone to 75 feet would reduce the size of buffers throughout the state. This would increase pollution, threaten clam flats, increase the number of Maine lakes with summer algal blooms, reduce property values (which have been directly tied to water quality), reduce protection of important wildlife habitat, and harm the character and recreational uses of Maine's waterways.

Maine's shoreland zoning law has been effective in helping curb pollution of our waters. Maine has some of the clearest and cleanest lakes in the nation and they are a draw for tourists and Mainers alike. We are the envy of nearby New England states, where lakes are significantly less clear. Shoreland zoning has also allowed generations of Mainers to enjoy traditional activities such as hunting, canoeing, fishing and bird watching along shores where these activities would otherwise be impossible due to development.

Maine's shoreland zoning law already has a great deal of flexibility, and many types of development and land management activities, such as timber harvests, are allowed in the shoreland zone. However, the shoreland zoning law serves to balance development and other extractive uses with protection of water quality, aesthetic character of the shoreline, and wildlife habitat. This law has worked for 40 years and should not be drastically weakened, as called for by LD 219.

NRCM opposes LD 219.