



# OPPOSE

## **LD 800—An Act to Prevent Passage of Alewives on the St. Croix River**

**Sponsor:** Representative TURNER of Burlington

**Co-Sponsors:** Senators BURNS of Washington, DAVIS of Piscataquis, and WILLETTE of Aroostook; and Representatives CRAFTS of Lisbon, HILLIARD of Belgrade, LYFORD of Eddington, REED of Carmel, SHAW of Standish, and SHORT of Pittsfield.

**Summary:** This bill requires the fishway on the Grand Falls Dam located on the St. Croix River to be configured or operated to prevent passage of river herring into the lakes that form the headwaters of the river, including, but not limited to, Grand Falls Flowage, Big Lake, West Grand Lake and Spednic Lake.

**Explanation:** This bill (LD 800) is an environmental roll-back that would overturn one of the most significant environmental victories of the 2013 legislative session—passage of a bill that opened up the St. Croix River to alewife passage. LD 800 would reinstate a misguided 1995 law that blocks upstream passage for alewives in the St. Croix River. A group of fishing guides in the Grand Lake Stream area promoted the 1995 law based on the mistaken belief that native alewives pose a threat to non-native smallmouth bass. There is no scientific evidence to support this claim. In fact, smallmouth bass and alewives coexist in lakes and waterways throughout Maine and the east coast of North America. In fact, the data shows that alewives are the ones that are eaten by smallmouth bass.

Alewives are sometimes referred to as “the Purina Chow of the sea”—serving as a critical food source for many valuable fish species, including salmon, striped bass, bluefish, cod, and haddock. In the 1980s, more than 2.6 million alewives traveled up the St. Croix River to native spawning habitat in upstream lakes, but the number of returning alewives collapsed to less than 1,000 fish after the legislature closed the Woodland and Grand Falls Dams to alewives in 1995.

Keeping the St. Croix River open for alewife passage could eventually produce an annual run of 20 million fish—which would provide huge benefits for ground fish in the Gulf of Maine. Maine scientists have linked the disappearance of coastal cod stocks to the dramatic decline in the number of alewives compared to historic levels. Alewives spend their lives at sea but swim up rivers to spawn in the spring. Large numbers of cod used to follow these fish close to shore where they could be caught more easily, supplying the Maine fishing industry with a lucrative catch.

Former Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Commissioner Ray “Bucky” Owen has called the alewife “the most important fish species in Maine” because of the role it plays as a food source for so many animals, including otters, whales, porpoise, eagles, and ospreys in addition to ground fish. The St. Croix has the potential to have the largest alewife run in Maine, about the size of the potential runs of the Penobscot and Kennebec Rivers combined. The Legislature should defeat LD 800 and allow the St. Croix alewife run to flourish again.

**NRCM opposes LD 800.**