

Good morning, I'm Rep. Woodman Page. Thank you, Chair Sheldon and members of the Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife Committee, for allowing me to testify on H 601 which proposes to declare Lake Memphremagog a lake in crisis. Many of you know, I was born and raised in Newport City, and it is currently my primary residence. Lake Memphremagog is located between Newport City in the south and Magog, Quebec Canada located at the very northern portion of the lake. The lake is approximately 31 miles long with three quarters of the lake existing in Canada. The lake has a rich history beginning with the Indigenous Peoples who lived in the area, and it has been a vital waterway to Canada from the very beginning. In the 1800s the lake was a tourist destination with the railroad bringing passengers from Montreal and New England and that attraction of visitors continues today. One could say that Lake Memphremagog is again being discovered by tourists from all over New England. The area has a board walk along the shores of Newport with a series of trail links for bikers, runners and skiers that covers nearly seven miles along the lake to the Canadian border and beyond. The area is quite beautiful as well.

The lake is undergoing a renaissance as it becomes more of an attraction for recreational tourism, but that could all be in jeopardy if Lake Memphremagog continues to deteriorate. The lake currently meets two conditions for the designation of a lake in crisis which are one: The lake does have areas that are classified as impaired. And the second item is that the condition of the lake will cause potential harm to the public health and is a risk of damage to the environment or natural resources and this is occurring through phosphorus runoff causing and contributing to excessive algae, thus impairing swimming and aesthetic uses of the lake. The phosphorus runoff is also contributing to cyanobacteria outbreaks, which pose threats to public health. There is a third criteria for a lake in crisis designation and that is property values have decreased for waterfront properties which has not occurred. It should be noted that H-657 would eliminate this requirement for a lake in crisis designation. Residents of the Lake Memphremagog community should not have to wait for their property values to decline before additional aid is rendered to the lake.

All rivers run north into Lake Memphremagog such as the Johns, Clyde, Barton, and the Black Rivers. These and other tributaries contribute to much of the phosphorus loading into the lake which needs to be located and mitigated. The Agency of Natural Resources has worked to improve the water quality and more can and should be done. The concern is that through negative publicity the naming of Lake Memphremagog as a Lake in Crisis might hurt the area economically by no longer being an attraction for tourism and our outdoor recreational activities.

The Agency of Natural Resources needs to continue its efforts in improving the water quality requirements related to specific harms to public health along with risks to the environment and natural resources such as lowering phosphorus levels and eliminating aquatic species and other threats to the lake. This is not an easy task with the current level of resources allocated. Should this committee not consider H-601 then I would request that more funding must be provided with the caution and request that funds not be reduced from current efforts that are being made by municipalities and organizations such as the VT Farm Bureau, the Memphremagog Watershed Association, Orleans Conservation District, and others.

In conclusion, whether this committee considers H-601 or not, there needs to be a discussion on the status of Lake Memphremagog. What actions need to be taken to improve the water quality now? What additional regulations, plans and protections will be required for the lake? Finally, and most important is to provide additional long-term funds that will be required beyond what is currently being provided. There should also be an acknowledgment that the Lake Memphremagog community should not have to wait to have its lake designated in crisis before having greater action taken to further improve the water quality of the lake.

Thank you,

Woody

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