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Public Relations and Outreach Campaign

To Reduce the Presence of Soft Plastic Lures in Maine's Waterways



February 17, 2021

Report Back to the 130th Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Presented by Francis Brautigam, Director of Fisheries & Hatcheries

A Department report (dated January 27, 2020) was presented to the 129th Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife in response to committee concerns regarding LD 695, An Act to Require Biodegradable Hooks and Lures for Freshwater Fishing. The consensus-based report was developed and supported by a stakeholder consultation and review process. The report provides available information regarding soft plastic lures (SPL) and their occurrence in fish and state waters, as well as offering recommendations to reduce occurrence in Maine waters. The Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife subsequently submitted a letter (February 4, 2020) to the Department in support of recommendations contained in the report, including:

- *Continuing education to increase public awareness regarding proper disposal of used soft plastic hooks and lures in Maine waters. The Department indicated that it will develop coordinated outreach in a number of platforms that may include the Maine Open Water and Ice Fishing Law Book, the Maine Fishing Guide, and social media outlets to support the "Pledge to Pitch It" campaign <https://www.pledgetopitchit.org/> (that educates and encourages anglers to pitch worn-out soft plastic baits into a trash can rather than in the water, this added to clarify the purpose of the campaign).*
- *Develop methods to increase public awareness regarding the proper use of soft plastic hooks and lures regarding the proper use of soft plastics retention devices and associated loss while fishing. The outreach campaign may include an agreement with the American Sportfishing Association to develop a "fact sheet" and video about retention methods and creating a collection of promotional materials that can be accessed by the public.*
- *Encouraging opportunities for research partners to investigate potential environmental impacts from soft plastic hooks and lures.*

The Joint Standing Committee further requested the Department to report on activities implemented and any subsequent recommendations in February of 2021. This report was prepared to address the Committee's request.

Public outreach will be supported by the Department and the American Sportfishing Association to create both local awareness in Maine, as well as national awareness. The goal of both the state and national public awareness campaigns is to change angler behaviors that contribute to SPL occurrence in state waters:

- 1) deliberate disposal of used SPLs that no longer fish properly;
- 2) the inadvertent loss while fishing when the lure is either pulled off the hook by a fish or the SPL is fished to a point where it is no longer retained by the hook; and
- 3) lack of awareness regarding SPLs in the environment

Generally, the Department will collaborate with the American Sportfishing Association (a national trade organization representing fishing tackle manufacturers) to share outreach content developed by each organization. Outreach developed by the American Sportfishing Association will be used to promote awareness at the national level and will include updates to the national “Pledge to Pitch It” campaign. Additionally, the Department will develop strategic outreach approaches designed to target different angler demographics in Maine by using traditional and digital communication approaches.

Featured campaign messaging will focus on:

- Why are SPLs an environmental concern;
- Public/angler perceptions – SPL occurrence in fish;
- Occurrence studies documenting presence and persistence in waters;
- Littering laws;
- SPL disposal options;
- Effective use of SPL retention strategies to prevent loss of SPLs while fishing; and
- Other strategies to reduce loss of SPLs while fishing

The Department’s focus for 2020 was the development of a Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife public relations and outreach campaign. The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) initially planned to contract with a marketing company, but the loss of a critical fund-raising event due to Covid, eliminated funding support for a contract; instead efforts were advanced using inhouse staff expertise. 2020 outreach accomplishments by the Department and ASA include:

- A written draft MDIFW SPL awareness campaign (see below);
- Updated outreach in 2021 Maine fishing law book;
- ASA identified commitments under its national campaign (see below);
- ASA developed list of high-profile partners contributing to the social media (PSAs, videos, social media, special events, etc.); and
- ASA began Facebook and twitter feeds; how to rig and minimize loss of lure while catching more fish

The specific details of the state and national campaigns are outlined below for implementation in 2021.

MDIFW Outreach Plan – 2021 Maine Focus

- **Angler survey.** Advance a public survey to develop a baseline understanding of the public’s awareness of issues related to fishing with SPL, including environmental concerns, disposal practices, and preventative steps to address inadvertent loss of SPLs in the water
- **MDIFW website.** Develop a new page on MDIFW’s website to house all outreach information and videos, this will be the center of all communications, including content provided by ASA and featuring the partnership between ASA and MDIFW – January 2021
- **How-to videos.** Create/share videos to demonstrate how to use SPL retention devices and the different options available – Coordinate with ASA/industry partners to use their products and have them in the videos with MDIFW staff
- **Email campaign.** Develop email campaign targeting all resident and nonresident anglers and Registered Maine Guides, for ice fishing and open water fishing, but particularly open water fishing.
- **Social media campaign.** Develop social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) campaign targeting all anglers, with emphasis on open water fishing.
- **Partner with retailers.** Explore partnership with retail tackle shops and industry / ASA / Sporting groups to share content with their followers. This may include some infographics.

- **Messaging from local/nationally known anglers.** Find well-known bass anglers with an active social media following to promote messaging
- **Coordination with partners.** Educational Zoom meeting to coordinate implementation with industry partners (guides, tackle shops, fishing clubs)
- **Increased local recycling.** Explore development of a more comprehensive Maine recycling and disposal program for SPLs (tournament and nontournament angling) with the organized bass fishing community and interface with national “Pledge to Pitch It” campaign.
- **Additional update to Maine Fishing Guide (digital).** Update Add to & update digital version of the Maine Fishing Guide
- **Update 2022 Fishing Lawbook.** Add any additional updates to the fish law book

ASA Commitments – 2021 National Focus

- **Messaging by national Pro-bass tournament staff.** Secure commitments from industry Pro-staff to engage with the outreach campaign on social media and special events.
- **Pledge to Pitch It Campaign.** Update the “Pledge to Pitch It” campaign (ASA) to create awareness regarding disposal of SPLs and promote use of SPL retention devices. Include the following: [Retention Device Materials Tool Kit](#) – a collection of promotional materials that can be accessed by the public for easy download and shareability like, one-sheets, buck slips, social media posts, articles, fact sheets, and videos, including “how to” information, etc.
- **Maine Retail Displays.** Development of materials and products for display at cooperating Maine retail outlets, as well as providing information in digital form.
- **Expanded Recycling of SPL.** Partner with the Recast and Recycle Campaign ran by national BOATUS.

Campaign Examples:

1 - Below is a screenshot of the soft plastic lure **campaign landing page** on the MDIFW website. All emails and social media posts will direct anglers here to learn more. How-to videos, manuals, and photos will be added to the

The screenshot shows the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife website. The header includes the MDIFW logo and navigation links for News, Forms, Contact Us, and Sitemap. A search bar is also present. The main navigation menu includes About, Hunting & Trapping, Fishing & Boating, ATV & Snowmobile, Fish & Wildlife, Game Wardens, Maine Wildlife Park, Programs & Resources, and News & Events. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home → Fishing & Boating → Fishing → Fishing with Soft Plastic Lures.

The page content is titled "Fishing with Soft Plastic Lures". It features a sidebar with a menu of fishing-related topics, including "Soft Plastic Lures". The main content area includes an introductory paragraph about the environmental impact of soft plastic lures, a photograph of various lures, and a "RELATED LINKS" section with a link to "Pledge to Pitch It". Below the text, there are three numbered steps for proper lure disposal, each with a plus sign to expand: 1. Properly dispose of soft plastic lures, 2. Secure your lure, and 3. Check your bait often.

The page also includes a "Frequently asked questions" section with the question "What is a soft plastic lure?". The answer states: "Soft plastic lures have been growing in popularity over the last 20 years as manufactures have released a greater variety and selection. Soft plastic lures come in all different colors, shapes, and

website page. Steps 1, 2, and 3 expand with more information. View the page live:

mefishwildlife.com/softplasticlures

2- Below is an example of a **social media post** (Facebook and Instagram post) the Department created to educate hunters on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and critical steps they should take to help keep CWD out of Maine. Similar posts will be made to educate anglers on proper use and disposal of soft plastic lures.



Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

October 23, 2020 · 🌐

Do your part to keep Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) out of Maine!

CWD is a fatal nervous system disease that impacts cervid (deer family) mammals. In deer, it has a 100% mortality rate.

If established in Maine, CWD may have devastating impacts on the state's deer and moose herds, our hunting heritage, and Maine's economy....

[See More](#)



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108 Comments 84 Shares

3- Also included is an example of an **email** the Department sent to licensed hunters encouraging them to make the switch to nonlead ammunition. [Click here to read the full email.](#) The same approach will be taken for the soft plastic lure outreach campaign. The Department currently has email addresses for nearly 300,000 anglers who fish in Maine.