

# MAINE AUDUBON

*Working to conserve Maine's wildlife and wildlife habitat*

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Rockweed Working Group  
Department of Marine Resources  
21 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0021

Members of the Rockweed Working Group:

I am writing on behalf of Maine Audubon and its 15,000 members and supporters to support the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's (MDIFW) proposal for rockweed harvesting closures at important wildlife areas.

Rockweed is a renewable resource that can provide Maine with new opportunities. It is essential, however, that the ecosystem in its entirety is considered when managing a rockweed harvesting program. Much of the existing research on the effects of rockweed harvesting examines biomass and other commercial fisheries. Additional impacts on wildlife (Hamilton 2001; Blinn et al, 2008) and food webs, however, (Schmidt et al, 2011) also should be considered. It is imperative that as the rockweed industry grows in Maine, we take a precautionary approach to ensure that harvesting is sustainable not only in terms of total biomass production, but also in terms of effects on biodiversity, rare and endangered species, and ecosystem functions.

The MDIFW proposal of restricted areas for harvesting is conservatively small, and focuses on six groups: Purple Sandpipers, Harlequin Ducks, migratory shorebirds, seabird nesting islands, colonial wading birds, and wintering waterfowl. All focal groups include *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* as determined by the State Wildlife Action Plan, and only sites of documented high importance are included. Purple Sandpipers, Harlequin ducks, and migrating shorebirds all rely on rockweed for both roosting (resting) habitat and foraging (feeding) habitat. Nesting seabirds, colonial wading birds, and wintering waterfowl are all sensitive to disturbance from harvesting activities; therefore MDIFW is recommending only seasonal closures to prevent disrupting these populations.

Wildlife is an integral component of Maine's identity and a large economic driver. The MDIFW proposal is a bare bones list of sites essential to the sustainability of our state's coastal wildlife. We encourage the working group to take action now to protect these high value wildlife areas from the impacts of rockweed harvesting.

Thank you for your efforts and for considering the views of and impacts to the diverse stakeholders with an interest in Maine's shores.

Sincerely yours,



Charles F. Gauvin  
Executive Director

### References

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Schmidt AL, Coll M, Romanuk T, Lotze HK. 2011. Ecosystem structure and services in eelgrass *Zostera marina* and rockweed *Ascophyllum nodosum* habitats. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 437:51-68