TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 341

"An Act To Promote Deer Hunting"

SPONSORED BY: Representative WADSWORTH of Hiram.

DATE OF HEARING: March 2, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Cyrway, Representative Duchesne and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Judy Camuso, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 341.**

The bill would limit the take of antlered deer to those with 3 or more one-inch tines along the main beam of either or both antlers.

The Department is opposed to the introduction of a mandatory antler point restriction because it may: 1) significantly decrease hunting opportunity, 2) result in high-grading of our buck population, and 3) do little in terms of actually providing a positive impact to the population demographics, or abundance, of Maine's white-tailed deer.

The purpose of an antler point restriction is to increase recruitment of yearling bucks into the adult age class. In this regard, the proposed APR would protect most of Maine's yearling bucks (~73%) from harvest. However, a mandatory APR would also protect approximately 46% (the proportion of adults, aged 2.5-6.5 years, with 5 or fewer points) of adult bucks from harvest. Thus, given the proposed APR, many of the bucks in the current annual harvest would be protected from hunters. This would significantly decrease the opportunity for hunters to successfully harvest deer. In fact, we estimate that the annual buck harvest would decline by about 50% if this bill is passed.

In addition, opportunity would also suffer in terms of more limited doe harvests through decreased issuance of Any-deer permits (ADPs). MDIF&W often employs expansion factors (e.g., issuing 7 ADPs for every 1 doe expected to be harvested) to ADP allocations in order to help ensure we meet our doe harvest objectives. Because an APR would severely restrict the state's buck harvest, and not knowing if hunters would thus be more likely to harvest a doe, we would be required to use a more conservative expansion factor. As an example, if this APR was in place in 2016 MDIF&W may have needed to

limit the issuance to approximately 5,300 ADPs (i.e., one permit for every one doe harvested) as opposed to the over 45,000 it did issue.

In other states APRs are often implemented to allow bucks to grow older, and thereby larger, often with the ultimate goal of increasing antler size. However, some recent studies have shown that APR's may actually be detrimental to antler growth as a result of increased removal rates of trophy antlered animals from the population. By only harvesting the larger yearlings and not allowing the harvest of the smaller mature males, an APR may inadvertently increase the abundance of the less genetically gifted animals, while simultaneously increasing harvest of the higher quality ones.

Although Maine's deer population is below objective in some parts of the state, the age structure of our deer herd is very healthy. A high proportion of bucks live to old age; we aged a buck from central Maine at 18.5 years of age! In fact, some states that have implemented APR did so in an attempt to achieve a buck age structure similar to what we currently have in Maine. Our deer herd also has a healthy sex ratio, with approximately 1.1 to 2.6 does/buck. It is important to keep the sex ratio skewed towards does since they are the most important segment of the population for reproduction in areas where the department is trying to grow the population based on public goals. However, it is important to note that our numbers are well under the ratio of 5 does/buck, which is the point at which demographics might suffer. Concerns over the number of older-aged bucks in the state are best addressed through measures to increase the total number of deer, not through changes in the percent of bucks in the population.

Switching the pressure from one age group to another does not protect the deer population, or even necessarily alter population demographics. It generally just switches the pressure from one age group to another age group. In addition, the natural mortality rate of the younger cohort of deer is much higher than the mortality rate of adult deer, so protecting the young bucks from harvest does not necessarily ensure their survival; especially in a state with winters as severe as Maine's. The most effective way to increase older bucks in the population is to increase the herd in total.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.