

LaCroix, Linda

From: Coldin thevalley <coldinthevalley301@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2019 12:29 PM
To: IFW
Subject: Testimony for LD 337

Linda,
Could you please see that all members of the IFW Committee get a copy of this?
Thank you in advance,
John Field

Testimony before the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee regarding LD 337

"An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season"

Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee: My name is John Field and I have been a lifelong resident of Maine for 62 years and have hunted big game since age 15. I agree that it is time for a spring bear hunting season, but likely for different reasons than most of this bill's sponsors. I believe a spring bear season will provide opportunity for IFW to better manage bear populations, increase bear hunting opportunities for Maine citizens, reduce spoilage of bear meat in warm weather and eliminate certain hunt methods deemed undesirable by much of Maine's population.

Maine currently has three separate seasons to hunt bear. A general season from August 26 to November 30 where you can spot and stalk bear, a baiting season from August 26 to September 21 and a dog season from September 9 to November 1. Even though many land owners allow spot and stalk bear hunting, very few bears are taken by hunters under the general season as bears are largely nocturnal and wary during the first part of the season. Spot and stalk hunters cannot compete with the dog or bait methods. There are many competing bear, deer, moose and bird hunters during the general bear season that end up training the bears to be nocturnal. Interference and conflicts between the various hunting groups are common. In the last part of the general season, cold weather in much of the bear woods causes the bears to "den up" for hibernation eliminating any further spot and stalk hunting opportunity.

In areas of Maine where bears are most abundant, very few landowners allow bear hunting with bait or dogs for the general public. In these prime bear hunting areas commercial operators make exclusive arrangement with large landowners to set up bait sites or hunts with dogs for their paying clients, who are mostly nonresidents. Maine hunters who want to hunt on their own or can't afford to hire an outfitter, are effectively shut out from most of Maine's prime bear hunting acreage. IFW bear harvest records for 2015 and 2016 show that Nonresidents harvest approximately 62% of all bears taken in Maine.

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It is often hot in the bear woods from August thru September. Bears are large animals with a high amount of body fat. Meat spoilage can happen rapidly. No hunter wants to lose their bear meat to spoilage, but it does happen. Once while scouting for moose in September, I happened on a bear carcass dumping spot not far from a local outfitter. Many bear carcasses had been dumped in one spot and several eagles were feeding on them. Unfortunately, the bear meat had likely spoiled before the bears could be cooled and butchered. Apparently, they had been able to save the hides as there was no hair or skulls at the site. Nothing was wasted as the hunters got their hides and eagles were cleaning up the rest, but I felt cooler weather would have provided a better outcome.

As a Maine hunter I would like to be able to hunt bear by the spot and stalk method, but as I outlined above, this is currently very difficult to do in the fall. While scouting moose in the spring, I have been approached by male bears either protecting their territory or looking for female bears. I believe I could easily harvest a male bear in the spring without the need of dogs or bait. It is my belief that IFW could eliminate hunting bears over bait or with dogs, establish spot and stalk hunt seasons in the spring and fall to achieve their management goals and reduce meat spoilage. For one example, British Columbia's Vancouver Island utilizes spring and fall spot and stalk (no bait or dogs) "fair chase" bear hunting and they have a lot of bears. Nonresidents have many opportunities to hire expert guides well trained in the spot and stalk method. Maine can do the same.

I respectfully suggest that LD 337 be amended to establish spring and fall spot and stalk bear hunting seasons and eliminate bear baiting and hunting bears with dogs. This will eliminate many hunting conflicts in the fall and provide opportunity for more Maine residents to harvest bears.