



Wild Blueberry Commission OF MAINE

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Written Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 337, An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season February 11, 2019

Dear Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau, and members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

Every spring, Maine's wild blueberry growers import thousands of honey bee hives to help pollinate the wild blueberry crop. These hives cost upwards of \$125 each and are significant cost to the growers. And these hives are also attractive to bears, who often destroy them in search of honey. Growers cordon off the hives with electric fencing, though not always successfully. Some employ professionals to catch and release the bears (who nevertheless often return to fields several times).

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine appreciates the intent of LD 337 to help curb the threat of harassment by bears in the spring. However, the Commission does question the potential scope and impact of a new spring hunting season. First and foremost, we want to ensure that hunting occurs during the appropriate time of year when cubs are not still dependent upon sows for food and shelter. Should the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife determine that spring is not an ideal time for a new hunt, we would offer in the alternative that the bag limit during the current fall bear hunt be increased to two. This could have the same effect of reducing the bear population without negatively impacting cubs.

Should a spring bear hunt be determined by Department scientists to be acceptable, we would offer questions about such a season: what would the bag limit be? When would the season actually be scheduled and for how long? Would the use of dogs and/or bait be allowed? Should there be a sunset provision on this bill to evaluate the population after a few years?

Given the above questions, the Commission provides these remarks as Neither For Nor Against LD 337. Thank you for your consideration.

Very Truly Yours,

Nancy McBrady, Executive Director