



Bringing ethics and science together for wildlife

Date: February 10, 2019  
To: Committee members, Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife  
From: Karen Coker, Director, WildWatch Maine  
Re: Opposition to LD 337 – An Act to Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season

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There are many reasons a spring bear-hunting season is wrong for Maine. The justification that one is necessary to control the bear population is troubling and illogical in a state that permits the placement of tons of high-calorie bait foods during the critical eight-week period before bears den for the winter.

IF&W's own website explains why this time frame is so important for successful bear reproduction:

- "If a female is **unable to store sufficient body fat prior to entering the den, the pregnancy is terminated.**"
- "Nutrition plays a **major role in determining the number of cubs that are produced and cub survival...**"

Considering that calorically-rich food subsidies are known to boost reproduction and population density, you would think an agency worried about overpopulation would have an interest in, at the very least, studying baiting's influence on Maine's bears.

Curiously, the department has never investigated this link. It claims that only natural food supplies are important. Its 40+year bear monitoring program, which it calls the best in the nation, **has never examined the impact of huge human food subsidies on Maine's bears**, although it is well equipped to pursue this research. If the state's biologists can radio-collar female bears to pinpoint where they den in the winter, they could also use radio collars to track females who visit bait sites and conduct the obvious follow-on research.

Wisconsin, like Maine, has a large black bear population and it also permits heavy baiting of bears over a longer season. It **has** conducted serious research on the role of bait in bear diets and found that it comprises more than 40% of the diet of bears killed in northern Wisconsin. The purpose of the study was to explore **whether bait may be contributing to the high population density of bears in northern Wisconsin**. Reports of the study are linked in my testimony and I encourage you to explore them.

<https://www.wpr.org/research-says-bait-makes-more-40-percent-bear-diets-northern-wisconsin>

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/sports/columnists/paul-smith/2017/07/12/smith-bait-makes-up-much-wisconsin-bears-diet/469585001/>

Rather than introduce a new hunting season to address the burgeoning bear population, I suggest that IF&W form a partnership with Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, which is interested in developing multi-state studies to understand how human food subsidies can alter the behavior of wildlife, impact reproduction, and contribute to over-population.

A spring bear hunting season is also a bad idea because:

- It is ethically indefensible to kill bears during the time period when they are emerging hungry from their dens and have young cubs to feed. If a mother is shot while away from her cubs, cubs are left to die of starvation, predation, or exposure.
- There is evidence that directives to hunters to spare mothers with cubs do not work because mothers often leave their youngest cubs to search for food without cubs in tow.
- Currently, bear hunters can start running packs of six dogs to train on bears on the first of July, and the fall hunting season is already nearly three months long. Adding a spring bear-hunting season would allow virtually **no time** for bears to live free from hunting threats during their active lives.

I urge you to defeat this proposal quickly. Thank you for considering my views.

Karen Coker  
Director  
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