



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Testimony in Opposition to LD 337
An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunt
Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
February 11, 2019

Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau, and members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Katie Hansberry and I am the Maine senior state director of The Humane Society of the United States.

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our Maine supporters, I respectfully urge you to vote ought not to pass on LD 337, does nothing to address the root cause of Maine's growing bear population or human-bear conflicts, but rather proposes the addition of a cruel and unsporting springtime bear hunt.

Hunting bears in the spring results in the orphaning of cubs who then are likely to suffer from starvation, predation, or exposure

“There is no way to prevent this [the killing of nursing females] from happening in a spring season, either through hunter education or timing of [the] season.”¹

Most cubs are born in January or February and in mid to late April, when mother bears typically lead their cubs away from their dens, cubs weigh only between four and ten pounds.² The cubs rely exclusively on their mothers for sustenance and protection. Bear cubs continue to suckle until the fall, not weaned until July through September, long after a spring bear hunt would have ended.³ LD 337 does not specify when the proposed spring bear hunt would begin, but cubs would only be several months old still dependent on their mothers for survival.

There is simply no way hunters can avoid killing nursing females if bear hunting is permitted in the spring. Studies show that hunters have difficulties determining the sex of bears even when they use bait or hounds, are attempting to avoid shooting a female, and are in close proximity to the bear.⁴ According to Dr. K.D. Elowe, “[a]n exceptionally large bear probably can be assumed to be a male, but it is impossible to tell whether a mid-sized solitary bear is male or female, regardless of hunters’ claims.”⁵ Bear researchers themselves have difficulties sexing bears, even at short distances.⁶ Even if a bear can be identified as female, it is virtually impossible for hunters to tell whether she is nursing. According to biologists, bears produce a small amount quantity of milk and because cubs nurse often, have little storage tissue.

¹ Thomas D. Beck et al., “Sociological and Ethical Considerations of Black Bear Hunting,” *Proceedings of the Western Black Bear Workshop* 5 (1995), p. 123

² <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/mammals/bear.html>

³ R. Bruce Gill and Thomas D. Beck, “Black Bear Management Plan: 1990-1995,” *Division Report No. 15, DOW-R-D-15-90*, Denver, CO: *Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Division of Wildlife* (1990); Charles J. Jonkel and Ian McT. Cowan, “The Black Bear in the Spruce-Fir Forest,” *Wildlife Monographs, The Wildlife Society* 27 (1971).

⁴ M. E. Obbard et al., “Suspended Baits: Can They Help Hunters Distinguish Male from Female American Black Bears?,” *Ursus* 19, no. 1 (2008), [http://dx.doi.org/10.2192/1537-6176\(2008\)19\[33:sbcthh\]2.0.co;2](http://dx.doi.org/10.2192/1537-6176(2008)19[33:sbcthh]2.0.co;2); Inman and Vaughan; Beck et al.

⁵ Elowe, K.D. 1990. Bear hunting with hounds: techniques and effects on bears and the public. *Proceedings of the Eastern Workshop on Black Bear Research and Management* 10:101---109. at p. 107.

⁶ Beck et al.

Moreover, a mother bear is not always accompanied by her cubs while she forages. Instead she often leaves them at the base of a tree or sends them up into a branch to wait for her, for up to a few hours, because females forage “at great distances from their cubs.”⁷ If pursued by hounds, a mother will leave her cubs in a tree so as to evade the hounds.⁸ Additionally, females do not bring their cubs to bait sites.⁹ Accordingly, a hunter has no way of knowing if the bear has cubs waiting for her somewhere nearby. Even when states prohibit the take of nursing females, hunters still kill them unintentionally.¹⁰

Proponents of a spring bear hunt claim that mothers with dependent cubs can be spared because nursing mothers are the last demographic of the black bear population to emerge in springtime after all the other sex and age classes of bears.¹¹ Yet, bear managers warn that even as most studies indicate that males emerge earlier than females from dens, the time differential is quite short.¹² Additionally, it cannot be reliably determined and a recent study has found Johnson that denning chronology is now shortened due to climate change.¹³ Thus it cannot be asserted that females with cubs will be safeguarded during a spring hunt by the timing of the season.

Spring bear hunting is not “fair chase” hunting

In springtime, bears experience “significant physiological stress” because the available food supply is neither sufficient for bears to maintain body weight, nor for replacing the loss of nutrients following months of hibernation.¹⁴ Bears are lethargic for the first few weeks after they emerge from the den¹⁵ and vegetation is sparse in springtime.¹⁶ At this time, bears are in poor physical condition and are especially vulnerable to hunter harassment. Killing bears while they are in poor body condition after hibernation is not “fair chase” hunting. The playing field is wholly uneven, and especially if hunters are also using hounds, bait, or traps.

Springtime bear hunts won’t reduce human-bear conflicts

Lastly, it’s completely unnecessary to open a springtime bear hunting season. While some proponents of a spring bear hunting season assert that it will help alleviate human-bear conflicts, several published biological studies contradict that notion as untrue. Hunters, trappers and wildlife control agents often remove the wrong bears—they kill the individuals not involved in nuisance behaviors. Bear-resistant trash cans, hazing programs and other humane methods work better to solve problems. Reducing human-bear conflict is resolved by changing human behaviors so that bears are not attracted to human or livestock areas. Commonsense measures to prevent conflicts include: making trash and garbage inaccessible, cleaning up grills, using electric fencing, night penning of animals and not feeding pets outdoors.

⁷ Ibid., p. 123

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ e.g., H. Hristienko et al., ring,” *Ursus* 15, no. 1 (2004), [http://dx.doi.org/10.2192/1537-6176\(2004\)015<0023:urdtma>2.0.co;2](http://dx.doi.org/10.2192/1537-6176(2004)015<0023:urdtma>2.0.co;2); G.B. Kolenosky and S.M. Strathearn, “Winter Denning of Black Bears in East-Central Ontario,” *International Conference on Bear Research and Management* 7 (1987); Hristienko and McDonald.

¹² Beck et al.

¹³ H. E. Johnson et al., “Human Development and Climate Affect Hibernation in a Large Carnivore with Implications for Human-Carnivore Conflicts,” *Journal of Applied Ecology* 55, no. 2 (Mar 2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.13021>.

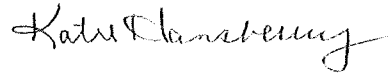
¹⁴ Beck et al., p. 124

¹⁵ Rogers, “Effects of Food Supply and Kinship on Social Behavior, Movements, and Population Growth of Black Bears in Northeastern Minnesota.”

¹⁶ Hristienko and McDonald

For these reasons, I urge you to maintain protections for black bears in the spring and to vote
ought not to pass on LD 337.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify on this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Hansberry".

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