

February 11, 2019

From: Sally O. Smyth, Camden, ME 04843, 207-236-6782

To: Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Re: Statement in **opposition** to No. 337:
“An Act to Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season”

A spring bear hunting season would be an embarrassment for the state of Maine. Please stop this “Act” from going any further.

MDIFW¹ has edited its website to claim that it is evolving—with difficulty—from dependence on the Pittman-Robertson Funds’ revenue streams that since 1937 have focused on conserving **game species for hunters**.

Suggesting a spring bear hunt perpetuates the traditional interpretation of “wildlife management” policies as “game management” policies—despite a clear decline in public support for this narrow vision of wildlife management.

The manufacturers of guns and ammunition have been the primary beneficiaries of this focus on game animals. These industries are shown to have enjoyed 1000% returns on gun and ammunition sales because paying the Pittman-Robertson federal excise tax allowed them to take credit for conserving game habitat and promoting hunting in it.²

¹ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

² An estimated Excise Tax-Related return on investment, which reports the returns to manufacturers who pay the tax, ranges between a low of 957% in 2006 to a high of 1,540% in 1996 (page 16 of “Return to Industry from Excise Tax on Firearms”

Initiating a spring bear hunt is a desperate attempt to expand the opportunities for Maine's declining numbers of hunting-related businesses and in particular, the hunting portion of the public.

This decline is nationwide and has been in place for many years, as the market for and profits from non-consumptive wildlife viewing and outdoor activity has grown apace. Bear populations may be increasing, but there is growing evidence that this comes from the baiting that occurs before the fall hunt. It's time to take the statistics seriously and change course.

Instead of a spring bear hunt, the MDIFW should be capitalizing on the public interest in and support of the wildlife in and around our communities. It's time to focus on methods of co-existing with the wildlife that occasionally gets in the way of our expanding human population.

Black bear expert Randy Cross was just in the news recently for placing orphaned cubs with surrogate mothers. Why give such orphans a second chance only to have their new mothers shot as they come out of their dens in the spring? Randy Cross also noted that black bears rarely complete any charges begun in fear.³ This kind of information has been available for years, but is neglected in favor of fostering public fear of bears. Dispelling the myths about black bear aggressiveness is a tiny step toward co-existence.

Bears can learn not to mis-behave around humans if MDIFW chooses to promote such simple steps toward co-existence with wildlife as installing bear-proof garbage disposal, taking

³ Bangor Daily News August 2 2018 "Biologists: Despite recent Nova Scotia incident, Maine black bears far more likely to run away than chase a human" by John Holyoke

down bird feeders, protecting domestic animals with electric fencing, taking care when hiking and camping and most of all of course, protecting the habitat where their natural foods are available. A dead bear has not learned anything.

A spring bear hunt is not the best solution to managing black bear populations. Please do not allow MDIFW to be sucked into taking this old game path. The world is changing, MDIFW needs to change with it.

Sincerely,

sos