

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

In Opposition to L.D. 337

An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season

SPONSORED BY Representative LYFORD of Eddington.

COSPONSORED BY Representatives: CAMPBELL of Orrington, DRINKWATER of Milford, JOHANSEN of Monticello, PICKETT of Dixfield, REED of Carmel, STEARNS of Guilford.

DATE OF HEARING: February 11, 2019

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Resource Management Director representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking in opposition to **L.D. 337**.

This bill requires the Commissioner to establish a spring bear hunting season. Currently, bears are hunted in Maine 13 weeks in the fall, starting on the first Monday preceding September 1st (with a youth day on the Saturday before opening day) and ending on the last day of the regular firearms season on deer. Bear hunting season and bag limits are established in Title 12 and the Commissioner does not currently have the authority to make adjustments to them in response to either biological or social factors.

Spring bear hunting seasons are used in several jurisdictions across North America to manage black bears and provide hunting opportunities. Spring bear hunting seasons have many positive aspects, including focusing the harvest primarily on males, providing relatively consistent hunter success rates, and encouraging hunter participation at a time of year when few other hunting opportunities are available. Maine has used spring bear hunting as an effective management tool in the past, and as indicated in our recently completed Big Game Plan, it may be a viable option at some point in the future.

Although spring bear hunting seasons can be a valuable management tool, the Department feels strongly that a spring season is not appropriate at this time. We believe there are significant social considerations related to whether or not the public would support a spring season, and some landowners have expressed concern over the potential for road damage caused by hunters during mud season. We feel that any effort to establish a spring hunt would have to include significant public consultation and outreach. As outlined in our Big Game Plan, our initial efforts are focused on increasing hunter interest and participation in bear hunting in the fall, and adjusting seasons and bag limits in order to effectively manage the bear population on a regional basis. This will require a change in statute to give the Commissioner the authority to adjust bear seasons and bag limits through rulemaking. Our understanding is that the committee will have the opportunity to consider a bill later this session that will achieve just that.

We encourage this committee consider giving us the time and authority to adjust bear hunting regulations in a careful, deliberate manner that will achieve our publicly derived bear management goals and be responsive to public concerns over bear hunting methods.

I would be happy to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.