

February 10, 2019

Re: LD 337: Spring Bear Hunt Proposal

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

This letter is to voice my opposition to L.D. 337 concerning the Spring Bear Hunt proposal.

I have spent over 40 years working as a commercial fisherman in Maine, sucked in one summer when I was on break while attending University of Southern Maine. One trip and I never wanted to do anything else. I am grateful that I have been able to spend most of my life on open water, doing what I love and getting paid for it. I imagine the passion of those who work in Maine's hunting industry must be similar to my feelings about working in the fishing industry.

Once upon a time, I could make a good living on a boat. Today, that is no longer the case. You see, where we went wrong is that we kept fishing, pretty much without restriction, until one day, we were not catching any fish. Then panic ensued and many restrictions were put in place to compensate for the years without, in the hopes that we could recover.

Although things have gotten a little better, they are not "better enough" for most of us to make a decent living on a commercial fishing boat. It will probably be many years, if ever, that commercial fishing will be able to support the number of folks it once did. We figured it out too late.

To help the fisherman who were struggling, state and government funds were provided to boat owners willing to give up their boats and for retraining programs, to help us to move out of a dying industry and into fields where we could again support ourselves and maybe even thrive. I was a recipient of some of those funds and now am working in another industry. It is not as much fun, but it is a living and I am thankful.

From where I am sitting, we are heading on a similar course with hunting in Maine. Despite that there are nature's signals everywhere that we are going the wrong direction, we continue to push forward, trying to find new possibilities to expand hunting. Honestly, I identify with that urge, but it is very likely that the gain from those new-found opportunities will end up costing us dearly down the road.

Don't get me wrong. Although I am against using bait that is not a natural diet for the target animal, I am not against hunting. But this proposal does not make sense to me as far as future sustainability goes.

Maybe instead of fighting for more short-term opportunities for hunters, trappers and guides, we should follow in the path of the fishing industry to reduce the harvesting of wildlife and then work to provide new viable business opportunities and re-training to those who rely on income from the hunting industry? I have read that ecotourism is on the rise and many of the people who work in the hunting industry could, with help, easily transition or expand into other areas of outdoor recreation instead of or in addition to hunting.

I know the next question will be “how do we pay for this?” I do not pretend to know how the money works, but perhaps some of the money from gun and ammunition sales that supports wildlife conservation could be directed to financing this transition? After all, it would be a project that conserves wildlife and helps those who love it.

I went on longer than I wanted. I am sorry for being so long winded. Thank you for listening. Please vote against this proposed hunt. Let's put our heads together to look at the bigger picture for the future of Maine's wildlife and for the people who depend on it.

Thank you,

David Calkins, Portland.