

TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 337 " An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season " Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife February 11, 2019

Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony in opposition to L.D. 337, "An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season." I believe this proposed bear hunting season is not only inhumane and unethical -- but also -- unnecessary and an ineffective wildlife management "solution."

Inhumane proposal

Spring bear hunts risk accidental killing of mother bears, leaving orphaned cubs behind to suffer from starvation, predation, or exposure, placing an increased burden on Maine wardens and more importantly, underfunded, non-profit wildlife rehabilitators.

Bear cubs can spend up to two years in their mother's care learning survival skills. Additionally, mother bears leave their cubs in trees when out foraging for food, which makes it difficult for hunters to distinguish between males and females before killing them.

Although male bears are known to awake slightly before female bears, this is not a certainty, especially considering changes to climate and reduced habitat (forcing bears to live closer to human population centers.) As a result of climate change, we are seeing changes to wildlife patterns and behaviors. Animals thought to hibernate during colder months are being seen out and about during warmer winter days. A quick check with area wildlife centers shows that many are caring for animals that have come out of hibernation early. I, myself, had a very confused woodchuck run across my path during a warm day last week. The same issues hold true for the hibernation cycle of mother bears.

In my opinion, the risk of accidentally killing a mother bear during the spring months is too great to allow for the proposed hunting season to move forward.

Ineffective solution to human/bear conflicts

If this proposal is in response to human/bear conflicts, it is unlikely that increased hunting seasons for bears will resolve this issue, as the bears targeted are rarely the same individual bears that are getting into neighborhood garbage cans and bird feeders.

A more effective long term solution than a Spring bear hunt, is to implement more proactive outreach and education programs to teach communities how to coexist peacefully with bears by taking common sense measures to prevent conflict.

The website for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife states:

"The most effective long-term solution to conflicts between people and bears is removing, securing, and properly storing attractants such as bird-feeders, garbage, grills, pet and livestock foods, livestock, and bee hives."

BearWise (<https://bearwise.org>) is an example of a successful large-scale community outreach program, with 15 participating member states – a program that could also benefit the state of Maine. BearWise was developed by bear experts from the Southeastern states supported by Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. According to its website, BearWise shares ways to prevent conflicts, provides resources to resolve problems, and encourages community initiatives and ordinances (i.e., wildlife-resistant trash storage, pet food storage, necessity for clean barbecue grills and bear-resistant deployment of bird feeders) to keep bears wild. Numerous communities throughout North America apply

BearWise practices. The result? Fewer conflicts between bears and humans.

Additionally, Maine's policy of bear baiting, acclimates bears to look for human food instead of foraging for their natural diet, which can contribute to human-bear conflict. As a result, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife should also consider conducting a risk-benefit analysis of the state's bear baiting policy.

Stop-gap solution to population control

If this Spring bear hunt proposal is in response to a scientifically documented population increase, then we should first address the cause of the rise in reproduction and population, instead of moving to implement a short-term, stop-gap "solution" of killing more bears during a time when mothers are caring for cubs.

Multiple studies, including the 2015 study conducted by the University of Southern Maine titled "Controlling the Black Bear Population in Maine." conclude that providing bait food (millions of pounds of human grade junk food) to black bears increases bear reproduction and population -- that even with regular hunting seasons, the bear population will continue to grow if we continue to use bait. However, the same study found that if bait was eliminated, that the bear population would initially drop and then level off to an acceptable carrying capacity.

With that knowledge, doesn't it make more sense to re-examine our baiting policy before implementing a bear hunt that jeopardizes nursing mothers with cubs and at best, provides a short-term stop gap approach to population "control?"

Increased "opportunity"

The only other motivation for the proposed Spring bear hunt that comes to mind is to provide more "opportunity" for hunters and guides. As only 10+/- % of Maine citizens hunt, a number that has been steadily declining over the years, it seems illogical to consider legislation that may have far reaching negative consequences and little benefit as a way to increase prospects for a declining industry.

In conclusion, I urge members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to vote "ought not to pass" on L.D. 337, "An Act To Start a Spring Bear Hunting Season."

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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