

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FIVE

H.P. 857 - L.D. 1322

Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Enhance Youth Hunting Participation

Sec. 1. Youth participation in hunting pilot program. Resolved: That the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, referred to in this resolve as "the department," in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Tourism, shall establish through rulemaking a 2-year pilot program to run for calendar years 2026 and 2027 to increase youth participation in hunting. The program must include expanded youth hunting seasons and outreach initiatives.

Sec. 2. Program components. Resolved: That the 2-year pilot program under section 1 consists of the following components.

1. The department shall schedule the youth spring wild turkey hunting day pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 12, section 11701, subsection 3 during a period with increased availability for youth hunters, such as a long weekend, or the department may establish a 2-day season on a Friday and Saturday.
2. The department shall establish a 2-day youth bear hunting season on a Friday and Saturday during a time when youth are more likely to be able to participate, such as late summer or early fall.
3. The department shall establish a day for youth hunting with dogs prior to the start of the regular season for hunting with dogs pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 12, section 11251, subsection 1.
4. The pilot program must include a robust public relations and social media campaign aimed at increasing awareness of youth hunting opportunities and promoting responsible and safe hunting practices.
5. The pilot program must include collaboration with community organizations, schools and outdoor retailers to host informational and educational events.
6. The department must invite the participation of hunting organizations, local communities and conservation groups to ensure the pilot program meets community and environmental standards.

Sec. 3. Rules. Resolved: That the department, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Tourism, shall adopt rules to implement the 2-year pilot program under section 1, including but not limited to setting specific dates for the pilot program and establishing participation guidelines and reporting requirements. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules as defined in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

Sec. 4. Report. Resolved: That the department shall report by January 6, 2027 and by January 5, 2028 on the implementation of the 2-year pilot program under section 1 to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over inland fisheries and wildlife matters. The report must include:

1. Participation data and demographic trends;
2. Feedback from participants and stakeholders;
3. The pilot program's impact on youth engagement and conservation awareness; and
4. Recommendations for pilot program continuation, modification or termination.

Sec. 5. Legislation. Resolved: That in the report submitted pursuant to section 4 in 2028, the department may include suggested legislation based on department findings during the 2-year pilot program under section 1. The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over inland fisheries and wildlife matters may submit legislation based on the report to the Second Regular Session of the 133rd Legislature.