

February 12, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the committee for Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Tyler Brown and I submit the following testimony in **opposition** to LD 205 “An act to amend the bag limit for turkey”

Maine’s turkey population has not always been one of abundance that is being seen in the lower half of the state, and is not consistent throughout the state. Beginning in 1942, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife had begun reintroduction of wild turkeys since their expatriation due to over-hunting and habitat loss in the 1880s. Several attempts were made with no success, it was not until 1977 that the department successfully reintroduced (41) wild turkeys in York and Eliot. Five years later (33) turkey were trapped from the flourishing York county population and released into Waldo County.

Eight years after their successful re-introduction, the commissioner MEDIFW was given the authority to establish the first spring turkey season and in May of 1986, York county held its first Spring Turkey hunting season, held for (16) half-days, only allowing the hunt until noon, with permits allotted by lottery allowing the harvest of one bird. Six years later the season was expanded to include portions of Cumberland county, then in 1996 the zones were expanded to other counties and increased the permits from (750) to (1250). Six years later MEDIFW added the fall season and eliminated the permit lottery, then opening the opportunity for all hunters in 2005. The expansion of wild turkey hunting in all of Maine was not complete until 2014 when the Spring season was opened all day and in 2015 when all of Maine’s Wildlife Management Districts had at least one season, thirty-eight years after their reintroduction.

Maine’s current seasons are not uniform across the state, while the spring season allows for the taking of two male turkeys in the majority of WMD’s, many of those in the north only allow the taking of one. The fall season is allowed in the majority of WMD’s but not in (6) northern zones due to a lack of significant population. These unique situations require carefully crafted bag limits and season lengths based on the 6th Pillar of the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation “***Science is the proper tool for discharge of wildlife policy***”.

Under Maines Revised Statute, Title 12, Part 13, Subpart 4, Chapter 915, Subchapter 8, Article 1, Subsection 11701, the authority to determine bag limits and season lengths rests with the Commissioner of MEDIFW “*The commissioner may establish open seasons for hunting wild turkeys, designate areas that are open to the taking of wild turkeys in any part of the State, prescribe the form and regulate the number of permits to be issued, determine the number and sex of the birds to be harvested, establish bag limits, establish permit eligibility requirements, establish legal hunting times, specify the types of weapons to be used during any open wild turkey hunting season and make any other rules that the commissioner considers necessary for the protection of the wild turkey resource*”.

While Maine's turkey population may appear to be over-abundant to some, that is hardly the case for the entire state as evidenced by the varying seasons, nor is it the norm across our country. Many states in the south where wild turkeys were never expatriated, are experiencing serious declines in their turkey populations, Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana and Oklahoma have experienced sharp declines by as much as 18% with harvest rates declining by as much as 31% between 2014 and 2019.. Setting the bag limit in Maine law to the same as ruffed grouse allowing the take of (4) turkeys a day and up to (8) in one's possession, fails to account for the varying seasons and bag limits across our state and would not allow MEDIFW the ability to alter bag limits to account for declining populations in a timely manner to ensure a sustainable harvest and populations.

The successful reintroduction of wild turkeys after nearly a century since their expatriation is a testament to the success of the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, and to the effective management of our wildlife by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Their science based methods and history of success in managing wild turkeys, is evidence that MEDIFW is the most qualified department to make responsible decisions based in science when regulating bag limits and season lengths to ensure sustainable wildlife populations for generations to come.

I urge you all to unanimously vote "Ought not to pass" on LD205 to preserve MEDIFW's ability to effectively manage our wildlife.

Thank you very much for your time and service to our state.

Tyler Brown