

Robert Fisk, Jr.
MFOA Legislative Committee
LD 1343

Testimony of Robert Fisk, Jr
Maine Friends of Animals Legislative Committee
In OPPOSITION to LD 1343, "An Act to Protect the Right to Harvest Wildlife"
Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
April 9, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. My name is Robert Fisk, Jr. I am testifying as chair of our Legislative Committee for Maine Friends of Animals in Falmouth.

In 2021, the legislature set in motion the confusion and uncertainty surrounding right to food by putting its hastily created first-in-the-nation constitutional amendment out to a referendum. It provided Maine voters little time or recourse to properly understand and defeat a flawed referendum that created more questions than it answered. The same issues remained in follow-up bills LD 1947 in 2023 and this year's LD 820 and LD 1343.

Some language in these LDs remains vague and very concerning. For example, will "traditional methods," "infringed," "reasonable," and "preferred means of management" be left open to individual interpretation? What about private property rights? How are landowners going to manage conflicts with "harvesters" on their own land?

How would "the unalienable constitutional right to harvest [hunt] food" impact local ordinances such as the environment and public safety, animal welfare laws, and enforcement of wildlife regulations? The idea that hunting and trapping are "preferred management tools" will make it harder for IF&W professionals to regulate outdated practices and likely result in more lengthy and costly constitutional challenges.

While the intent of bills LD 820 and LD 1343 may be, in good part, to offer a definition of "harvest" to incorporate "hunt," the Maine Supreme Court ruled in 2024 that it is not necessary.

As Tim Peabody, Inland Fisheries & Wildlife's Deputy Commissioner (and former Colonel of the Maine Warden Service), said in his testimony on the similar bill, LD 820, "The Department feels that the constitutional right to hunt, although limited to legal hunting for food, is already in place and is concerned that the language in LD 820 would be a duplication and will create challenges for the Warden Service while checking hunters and anglers, and will generate questions on reasonable legislative actions and Department rule-making, thus the potential for more litigation. For these reasons, we are opposed to the bill."

If a bill like LD 1343 passes, it could tie the Department of IFW's hands when it comes to managing wildlife, including using the best science; it also takes away the voice of those who do not hunt or trap when it comes to Maine's natural resources. LD 1343 seeks to codify cruel, outdated and ineffective practices into our state's constitution with unnecessary language.

Our rights to hunt, trap and fish are not in danger of being eliminated. LD 1343 and other bills like them are not only unnecessary, but misleading in their titles, poorly written and still fail to consider the unintended consequences of the legislation itself. I urge the committee to vote 'Ought Not to Pass' on LD 1343. Thank you for your consideration.