

**TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER - IN OPPOSITION TO
LD 1532, An Act to Expand the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Outdoor Education Programs to Schools and Communities
Committee On Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, April 16, 2025**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee:

I am writing in opposition to LD 1532. I do not believe that outdoor education, specifically hunting trapping and fishing should be connected to the Department of Education for the school curriculum. While I don't see a fiscal note attached to this bill, I also do not believe that funds should be allotted to this type of education.

Maine has many opportunities already for children to learn to appreciate wildlife and enjoy the outdoors through various nonprofit organizations such as the Maine Audubon Society, Center for Wildlife and more.

Additionally, the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife provides many youth hunting opportunities and hunter safety courses throughout Maine for those children who might be interested in this type of activity.

In recent testimony opposing a Sunday hunting bill for youth (LD 439), commissioner Judy Camuso states:

Each year, the Department provides scholarships to approximately 400 children to attend conservation programs that teach hunter education and shooting sports and provides equipment and resources to several partnering organizations who offer youth-oriented hunting and shooting sports programs. ... the Department offers a variety of workshops and training sessions through its advanced hunter education program and at our shooting ranges. These programs and workshops have over 10,000 participants each year.

This indicates to me that we have more than enough opportunities for youth interested in pursuing consumptive and non-consumptive outdoor activities in Maine and do not need to fund more or offer additional courses as part of the school curriculum.

Additionally, instead of spending valuable resources on recruiting children into activities that have long been in decline, a better investment would be to focus on education and outreach that promotes coexistence over killing with an eye towards expanding and capitalizing on the rapidly expanding industry of ecotourism in Maine.

Such an effort paid off greatly in [Costa Rica](#), which is a similar size to Maine. Hunting is no longer legal and the shifted focus to coexistence and ecotourism has paid off greatly.

1. Tourism now accounts for roughly 13.5% of Costa Rica's GDP, with ecotourism being the fastest-growing sector of the tourism industry.
2. Costa Rica receives around 3 million visitors annually, with over 60% participating in some form of ecotourism activity.
3. The average ecotourist spend 10-14 days in the country and spend significantly more per day than conventional tourists.
4. Costa Rica contains about 5% of the world's biodiversity despite occupying only 0.03% of Earth's surface.
5. Revenue from ecotourism has helped establish and maintain 30 national parks, 51 wildlife refuges, 13 forest reserves and 8 biological reserves.
6. Local communities receive direct economic benefits with about 80% of ecotourism revenues staying within the country.

While I'm not suggesting ending the hunting heritage of Maine, as I know many rely on this activity to feed their families, I think it's time to revisit the constant financial investment in expanding an industry that's long been in decline.

Thank you,

Susanna Richer
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