



RE: Support of LD 205 – An Act to Amend the Bag Limit for Turkey

Good afternoon Senato Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and esteemed members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. My name is Jared Bornstein and I'm testifying today to represent my client, the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, in support of LD 205.

The Wild Blueberry Commission (WBCM) works on behalf of Maine's 512¹ farms who grow wild blueberries on 47,600¹ acres across the State. In 2024, Maine produced approximately 85 million pounds of wild blueberries representing nearly 100% of all *wild* blueberries and approximately 10% of all *blueberries* grown in the US. Our industry contributes \$361 million dollars to the state's economy annually² and is the only state with significant commercial production of wild blueberries.

I applaud the State's successful effort to repopulate wild turkeys. Today's populations are far greater than the 33 birds reintroduced in 1982, and they can be found in all 16 counties. However, this abundance is becoming increasingly difficult for our farmers to manage.

In Maine's wild blueberry fields, turkeys are a problematic pest. A University of Maine study 15 years ago found that (1) most (60%) wild blueberry growers are concerned about wild blueberries eating their fruit, (2) turkeys were present on fields 29% of the time during the survey, (3) and during the fruiting season wild blueberries comprised 46% of the food items used. The study also found that loss of fruit to turkeys represented 0.05% of the total wild blueberry crop. Applied to our 2024 harvest that is a total of 4.25 M lb of fruit, worth approximately \$6.46 M on the commodity market. I'll also note that the study found that more farmers (66%) were concerned about deer predation than turkey.

The 2010 study, widely referred to as evidence that turkeys have an insignificant impact on wild blueberry farms, is 15 years old. Current estimates place the spring turkey population at 70,000 birds.³ Although we were unable to find MEDIFW estimates of the population size when this study took place, the Mount Desert Island and Schoodic Point Christmas Bird Count⁴ observed about 4 times as many turkeys from 2018 to 2022 as they did from 2008 to 2011. In other words, there may be four times as

¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2022. Berries: 2022. United States Census of Agriculture.

² Camoine Associates. Unpublished Data. Economic and Fiscal Impacts of the Maine Wild Blueberry Industry. Wild Blueberry Association of North America – US, October 2023.

³ Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MEIFW). 2025. Wild Turkey. Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/birds/wild-turkey.html> on February 9, 2025.

⁴ Schoodic Institute at Acadia National Park. 2023. Wild Turkeys on the Rise. Retrieved from <https://schoodicinstitute.org/wild-turkeys-on-the-rise/> on February 9, 2025.



many turkeys spending 29% of their time on wild blueberry fields today, as there were when the wild blueberry study was conducted from 2008 to 2010, and the \$6.46 M estimated impact on the industry could be 4 times as high.

I don't know if increasing bag limits for turkeys will help to control this problem. I only ask that the biologists at MEDIFW consider this challenge and use their expertise to develop and offer solutions.

I will offer one idea for consideration. We understand that the State this year is offering agricultural landowners' permits, which those landowners can hand out to hunters, to better control deer in their crop fields. Deer browse of wild blueberry buds causes the sprouting of lateral shoots and makes it impossible to harvest a high quality fruit from those browsed plants using a rake. Undoubtedly this causes more economic damage to our farmers than turkey. The Department, I understand, has a new program called the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) and they are planning to present this program to wild blueberry growers at the University of Maine Extension's annual wild blueberry winter conference this Saturday. This program would allow for improved control of deer on farmland, and I ask that the Department consider expanding DMAP to include turkeys.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

