

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND  
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 751**

**“An Act to Amend the Hunting Laws Related to the Training of Dogs and Open  
Training Seasons”**

**Reported by: Representative ROBERTS of South Berwick**

**DATE OF HEARING: Monday, March 10, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Dan Scott, Colonel for the Maine Warden Service at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of L.D. 751 An Act to Amend the Hunting Laws Related to the Training of Dogs and Open Training Seasons.

This bill continues a provision in law related to the training of dogs for bear hunting within Washington and Hancock Counties that was scheduled to be repealed May 1, 2025.

**History**

On June 15, 2023 **PUBLIC LAW 2023 CHAPTER 172**, “An Act to Amend the Hunting Laws as They Pertain to the Training of Dogs” (a sunsetted law) went into effect by emergency. This law will be repealed on May 1, 2025, unless the Legislature decides to extend the law. The law allows residents to train up to 6 dogs at any one time on bear in portions of Washington and Hancock counties that are situated south of Route 9 as long as landowner permission is obtained when the training of dogs would occur on land used for wild blueberry production.

The law required that IFW report any findings and recommendations resulting from the changes in practice to the IFW Committee by January 15, 2025 and after the report back was presented, the committee had the option to report out a bill related to the subject matter of the report during the 132nd Legislature in 2025. The Committee supported putting a bill in to permanently enact this into law, which is the reason for this bill.

Our agency provided a report back in January to the IFW Legislative Committee and as a reminder here is an overview:

Traditionally areas south of Route 9 in Washington and Hancock Counties have been closed to the training of dogs. A majority of this land is privately owned by wild

blueberry companies and has an abundant bear population, which generally leads to many bear feeding in the blueberry fields just before or during the harvest period creating conflict-related complaints. A temporary law went into effect in 2023 that allowed hunters to train dogs on this land within Washington and Hancock Counties, only after gaining permission from the landowners. MDIFW staff in this region have only heard positive information from the bear hunters training their dogs and therefore are recommending this law become permanent.

This law has been in place now for 2 training seasons. Maine Warden Service would be responsible for handling any complaints related to someone training dogs on bear. The Warden Service didn't receive any complaints during the 2023 or 2024 training seasons. Game wardens often interact with sportsmen and the public and no wardens in these areas have fielded any objections to the emergency law as it is written. Wardens and regional wildlife biologists have received feedback from hunters who use dogs to train and hunt bear in this area and they have expressed appreciation for the additional opportunity to train their dogs on bear.

Hunters training their dogs in this area have been especially careful participating in this activity so not to risk losing this privilege, there have been no reports from landowners indicating whether this law has had any effect on reducing bear conflict issues and there have been no negative complaints about dogs being trained in the blueberry fields without permission. We hope this provides useful information as the Legislature deliberates on extending this law or allowing it to sunset.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.