

## **Testimony in Support of LD 820**

### **RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish the Right to Hunt and Fish**

**March 12, 2025**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the committee, my name is James Cote and I am here on behalf of the Maine Professional Guides Association and Maine Trappers Association in support of LD 820.

Simply put, enshrining the right to hunt and fish in our constitution is a meaningful pursuit for Maine sportsmen and women. And for the people that I represent, this cause has no partisan bearing.

We are also well aware that attempts to pass a constitutional amendment such as this have failed on a number of occasions. We agree that any amendment to our constitution should be subject to diligence, scrutiny and strong legislative thresholds.

If crafted appropriately, a constitutional amendment to protect the right to hunt and fish should be able to satisfy any concerns of landowners, regulators, and other stakeholders. We believe that landowners rights should not be infringed upon by another constitutional right, and that our regulators- the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife- should retain the ability to promulgate appropriate rules and regulations to benefit the conservation and management of wildlife in Maine.

Should this proposal move forward, we would request that it also include regulated trapping as a preferred means of wildlife management.

I have personally cautioned those that I represent that a constitutional right to hunting, fishing- and hopefully trapping- does not mean that these pursuits will be harbored from any future change. Reasonable regulations will ebb and flow, with stakeholder input and scientific and biological inputs and proper enforcement mechanisms still paramount.

What this amendment will do is protect the fundamental activities of hunting, fishing- and hopefully trapping- and the storied outdoor heritage that goes along with them at the highest level. Part symbolic and part legal protection, it sends a message to the hundreds of thousands of hunters, anglers, and trappers in all parts of Maine that what they enjoy doing, what they have grown up doing, and the things that they are passing along to future generations are important and recognized, and that at their most fundamental are things that Maine agrees are worth protecting. That the value these activities bring to sound wildlife management is necessary.

We are not naïve and understand well the difficult path that this legislation must navigate. All we can ask of you- our elected representatives- is to give this proposal a fair shake. To consider the

generations of sportsmen and women and children that will read about this at their kitchen tables and factor their beliefs into your decision.

This proposal poses harm to only those who wish to abolish hunting, fishing and trapping in their entirety. I would argue that this population of people is more than likely statistically insignificant. Instead, it would be supported by the vast majority of people-sportsmen and non-sportsmen-who believe that well-regulated hunting, fishing and trapping are a preferred means of wildlife management and should be protected. That these endeavors should not just be for the wealthy or privileged. That using taxpayer dollars to fund government and private contractor wildlife harvest or eradication is not consistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

In its simplest form, this proposal is well-intended and consistent with what we for generations have agreed is the world's most effective means of wildlife conservation. Take it for what it is, think of those at their kitchen tables, and cast a vote that is reflective of the majority of them.

We would be happy to participate in any efforts to thoroughly review the language to ensure that we avoid any negative or unintended consequences. Thank you for your consideration.