



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, distinguished members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, I'm Steve Foster, Representative for House District 32, serving Charleston, Dexter, Exeter, Garland, Stetson, and a part of Bradford, here to present LD 866 "An Act to Reduce Posting of Hunting Lands by Providing Free Antlerless Deer Permits to Certain Landowners Who Keep Their Lands Open to Hunting"

Near the end of the 130th Legislature, this committee and the legislature made significant changes to the antlerless deer permit process for Maine hunters. Beginning with the 2022 season, anyone who was successful in the permit drawing, was required to pay \$12.00 to receive it plus a \$2.00 agent processing fee. This \$14.00 would allow the applicant to harvest an antlerless deer as well as an antlered one. Additional permits were also available for an additional \$14.00, first come first served, in Wildlife Management Districts where initial applications did not exhaust the number of allocated permits.

Prior to this change, landowners who met certain requirements could enter a separate antlerless landowner permit drawing. One longstanding eligibility requirement was that the owner leave the property open to hunting. If the landowner was unsuccessful in obtaining one of the 25% of allocated permits set aside in that wildlife management district, their application would then be included in the general permit drawing. If successful, the applicant would receive a free permit. After the drawings, if extra permits were available in any management district, the applicant could purchase one for a fee.

One requirement for landowners to be eligible for the Landowner Permit drawing was to keep their land open for others to hunt. Even though the value of being able to improve their chance of getting a permit did little to offset the taxes paid each year on the property, it was something. While hunters found increased posting of acres accessible in the past, this requirement kept land owned by other hunters open to them. In 2022, those landowners fortunate to receive a permit during the landowner drawing, now had the added benefit of paying \$14.00 for the privilege, as long as they didn't post their property.

Since this program was initiated, most constituent hunters I've spoken with have been unhappy with the increased cost of a permit to hunt for an antlerless deer. But, every landowner hunter I've spoken with has been quite unhappy with the change. Some have stopped entering the drawing, some won't pay the fee if successful, and some are angry that they are now required to pay 50% of the total cost of their big game license for the permit.

District 32 Charleston, Dexter, Exeter, Garland, Stetson, Bradford (part)

On Sept. 18th, I was contacted by an elderly gentleman in Exeter who'd been notified he was successful in the landowner Permit drawing, but missed the Sept. 12th deadline for the \$14 payment. At 78, he's not online very often, and learned of his error from a friend on the 17th. Having hunted for 65 years, often receiving a landowner permit in recent years, he was quite upset. I contacted the Department on the 19th, and although extra permits were made available for the first time in District 17 a few days later, he was notified on Oct. 3rd no permits were left. That's the impetus for the bill I'm presenting today.

Landowner hunters are paying increasing property taxes on land they've left open to others for years. Whether out of a sense of maintaining a longstanding Maine tradition, an opposition to posting of other lands their families hunted for generations, or the chance to secure one of the permits set aside for those like themselves, this Department change seems to run counter to the message of supporting Maine landowners. With the increase in extra permits in recent years, some may wonder why they should continue these traditions when leaving their lands open to others offers little benefit.

This bill is simply a return to what was available to landowners prior to 2022. For those entering the Landowner Permit drawing, if successful in that drawing, the general drawing, or in obtaining a leftover permit, their first antlerless permit would be free, saving them \$14.00 and securing access to their land for other hunters.

I thank you for your time and would try to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,
Steve Foster
State Representative