



Maine Professional Guides Association

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Testimony in Support of LD 2054

An Act to Clarify the Laws Regarding Moose Hunting Permits for Hunting Outfitters

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the committee, my name is James Cote and I am here today on behalf of the Maine Professional Guides Association (MPGA) in support of LD 2054.

While some MPGA members have benefited from moose hunting permits for hunting outfitters, also known as the "lodge tag program", concern has been growing amongst many member guides in recent years about negative impacts and unintended consequences of the program. We view this legislation as a necessary "check up" on the program, and a good way to clean up various interpretations of its intent and implementation.

Regarding Section 1, we would encourage the committee to further specify and clarify the prohibition on deferring these permits. MPGA supports the ability of a hunter to request a deferment from the Commissioner based on extreme and unfortunate circumstances that prevent them from participating in the hunt that they have paid for. However, we support a prohibition on deferring permits if the requesting party is the outfitter that received the permit initially. Deferments should not be used to manipulate the "lodge tag" lottery, or to create market opportunities in the following year.

Regarding Section 2, we support the proposed prohibition on selling these tags to a subpermittee, and believe that the proposed language would be consistent with the existing prohibition for general moose lottery recipients. The subpermittee designation should not be an opportunity to manipulate the system.

Additionally, we would propose/support two other concepts for the committee's consideration:

First, we believe that the program must preserve non-resident moose tags in all WMDs and seasons. In some circumstances today, every non-resident tag in a WMD is consumed by the lodge tag program, leaving non-resident hunters no opportunity to hunt in those WMDs, and subsequently, no opportunity for Maine guides to market to those hunters. We believe that capping the number of non-resident tags that can be consumed by the lodge tag program at 50% by WMD and season, would provide a fair and reasonable opportunity for guides that do not participate in the lodge tag program to market to non-residents. This would also help to alleviate pressure that some guides are experiencing during the September hunt in other WMDs, where we have seen a precipitous decline in calls for guided hunts due to the greater penetration of lodge tag hunts.

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Second, we would encourage the committee to explore options to incentivize, or provide preference, for qualified outfitters to draw tags in the WMD where their facility is located. There are a number of options to do this, and we would be pleased to have that discussion with you and the Department. Providing this incentive or preference, would be a welcome opportunity for many outfitters and guides who would like to service their trip out of their own camp, kitchen, and adjacent woods.

Based on the committee's interest and direction, we would be pleased to work with you and the Department in advance of the work session to continue to refine these ideas in hopes of passing legislation that is fair and equitable for all stakeholders, and in our interest, balances the value of this hunt for individual guides as well as qualifying outfitters.

Thank you for your consideration.