



Wild Blueberry Commission OF MAINE

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Eric Venturini, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 268.

An Act To Eliminate Online Burn Permit Fees for All Areas of the State.

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and esteemed members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Eric Venturini and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine.

Wild Blueberries are a cultural icon in the state of Maine. If you’ve even driven on the state roads of Downeast Maine in the late fall or the early spring, it’s likely you’ve seen the blackened charred fields along the roadside, in some cases still smoking. These fields are examples of the traditional practice of burning wild blueberry fields after a harvest cycle. After blueberry fields flower, produce fruit, and are harvested, the plants must be pruned to the ground in some fashion. This encourages the plants to grow vegetatively in the following season, storing up energy reserves so that they can flower and fruit again in two years. Today, most fields are cut back with a specialized piece of mowing equipment called a flail mower. However, many fields, especially smaller, steeper, rocky fields that cannot be easily accessed by larger equipment, are still burned. Per state statute, Title 12, part 11, Chapter 807, subchapter 4, Article 2 (Out-of-door fires), the burning of blueberry fields requires a permit.

The simpler the permitting process, the better. This legislation proposes simplifying the permitting process by eliminating the costs associated with online burn permits. If passed, this bill will encourage more wild blueberry farmers to take advantage of the online permitting process, saving their time and the time of their municipalities. By encouraging more people to obtain permits online this will reduce the face-to-face interactions that take place during the permitting process and help to keep wild blueberry farmers and town clerks safe during this pandemic.

The Wild Blueberry Commission supports the passage of this bill.