

Gina Garey
Animal Wellness Action

To the Honorable committee for Inland fisheries and Wildlife chair, and members;
I apologize I was unable to present my testimony opposing LD 142 in person due to a previous commitment this morning.

LD 142, was previously submitted as LD 1118, and was vigorously opposed.

The reasons are many and as you know, current hunting methods for black bear in Maine are under ongoing question as to their efficacy and are inherently inhumane, leaving a black mark on the State of Maine's reputation for conservation of its iconic black bears.

In addition, state wildlife managers have yet to conduct the research required to establish any expanded hunt is needed, and doing so in this manner amounts to a power grab that effectively leaves the legislature out of the process in the future management of the state's valuable public resource, its revered wildlife.

In addressing the current practices of hunting bear in Maine, one questions whether the feeding and killing of bear over human food waste at point blank range amounts to hunting, and may, in fact, be a contributing factor in the growth of the population over the past decade.

This raises valid questions on the efficacy of the department's efforts to control the bear population, and whether their policies and support of this practice have indeed created the very problem they now seek to resolve through this bill, by expanding those very practices without input from the legislature going forward.

Estimates on an increase in Maine's Bear population from 23k to 35k in 15 years demonstrates that IF&W has failed in their mission to effectively manage our bear population, and their responsibility to reduce the potential for human bear conflict; by feeding bears before their denning season. Bear hunting in Maine continues without the benefit of applying the scientific data within our existing bear management program, and by continuing to bait/feed them, the bear population continues to grow. It is illegal in Maine to bait deer to hunt them, yet IF&W has not yet adopted this sensible rule for bears, in spite of the evidence. Extending the season for feeding of bears will only exacerbate this problem.

Trapping and the aggressive pursuit of bears with hounds is inherently cruel and abusive. How can leaving a frightened bear to suffer in a 2 1/2-inch foot snare for up to 24 hours be thought of as anything but inhumane? Current rules already permit these practices to go on far too long. A proposal to extend this suffering for many more weeks is completely unacceptable. Trapping bears should be outlawed, not made worse by introducing additional traps.

The cruelty inherent in current hunting methods, such as the use of inhumane snares, is widely frowned upon by a majority of Americans who prefer conservation of species over inhumane management practices.

Finally, I oppose LD 142 and believe it is the responsibility of the Commissioner, and IF&W to immediately undertake studies to investigate how bait may be altering bear behavior, impacting reproduction and contributing to over-population, as well as seeking alternative management methods that are humane.

I urge you all to vote ought not to pass on LD 142.

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