

Don Loprieno
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I am writing to express strong opposition to LD 142, a version of which was originally heard last year as LD 1118 and would give the DIFW commissioner the authority to modify the bear trapping season in addition to proposing, among other things, that more bears should be hunted and killed. If changes like this and others are sought by the committee, they should be discussed and considered in the legislature where the citizens of Maine have a voice, not in the closed forum of a work session.

As the committee must know, there are many citizens in this state who are opposed to current bear management practices as shown by two fairly recent referendums advocating reform.

Expanding those objectionable practices –trapping, baiting, hounding –without further public involvement increases the risk that a third referendum may be proposed in the near future.

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is concerned about the apparent increase of bears and the department has recently recognized it needs better population estimates, even issuing a call for proposals to develop more accurate information about Maine's bears. Any legislation that alters present rules and regulations that govern bear management should wait until comprehensive and scientific studies are complete.

Trapping bears, for instance, even at the present level, is a stain on the state's reputation and a sop thrown to out-of-state hunters who would turn Maine's signature animal into a trophy or a rug. Bears deserve far better treatment than to be held captive in a trap, afraid and probably injured, until they're executed at point blank range. Even worse is the hounding of bears by GPS collared dogs who run the animal to death or drive it up a tree where it can be shot. Each of these practices does a grave disservice not only to bears themselves but also to Maine's image as a state that practices humane hunting and fair play. Trapping and hounding should be ended, not expanded.

Baiting – shooting a bear as it feasts on piles of human junk food – is another practice we'd rather not have widely known and for good reason, since it's more like ambushing than hunting. In fact, it may well be the reason for the increase in the bear population, suggesting that DIFW current policy has created the problem it now needs to solve.

All in all, the Department needs to practice the science it often claims to have and should include more than just killing in its management toolbox. It should also decide whether its policies benefit the bears or those who would hunt them.

For all these reasons, I urge the committee to reject LD 142.

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