

TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 142

“An Act to Give the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Rule-Making Authority to Establish a Bear Season Framework and Bag Limits”

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

February 8, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative Landry and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony in opposition L.D. 142, "An Act to Give the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Rule-Making Authority to Establish a Bear Season Framework and Bag Limits." I believe this proposal is not only inhumane and unethical -- but also -- unnecessary and an ineffective wildlife management “solution” to a “problem” that I am not convinced exists.

Stop-gap solution to population control

Although I am not aware of any scientific, data-reliant studies that show a dangerous overpopulation of black bear in Maine, if L.D. 142 was submitted in response to a **scientifically documented** population increase, then we should first identify and address the cause of the rise in reproduction and population, instead of moving to implement a “solution” of killing more bears.

Multiple studies, including a 2017 study titled “[Consumption of intentional food subsidies by a hunted carnivore: Carnivore Use of Subsidies](#)” and the 2015 study conducted by the University of Southern Maine titled “[Controlling the Black Bear Population in Maine](#).” conclude that providing bait food (millions of pounds of human grade junk food) to black bears increases bear reproduction and population -- that even with regular hunting seasons, the bear population will continue to grow if we continue to use bait. However, the same studies found that if human grade food/bait was eliminated, the bear population would initially drop and then level off to an acceptable carrying capacity.

With that knowledge, doesn't it make sense to examine the impact of our bear feeding / baiting policy before extending bear hunting seasons and altering bag limits?

Ineffective solution to human/bear conflicts

If this proposal is in response to human/bear conflicts, it is unlikely that increased hunting seasons or bag limits for bears will resolve this issue, as the bears targeted are rarely the same individual bears that are getting into neighborhood garbage cans and bird feeders.

A more effective long term solution than expanding seasons is to implement more proactive outreach and education programs to teach communities how to coexist peacefully with bears by taking common sense measures to prevent conflict.

The website for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife states:

“The most effective long-term solution to conflicts between people and bears is removing, securing, and properly storing attractants such as bird-feeders, garbage, grills, pet and livestock foods, livestock, and bee hives.”

[BearWise](https://bearwise.org) (https://bearwise.org) is an example of a successful large-scale community outreach program, with 15 participating member states – a program that could also benefit the state of Maine. BearWise was developed by bear experts from the Southeastern states supported by Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. According to its website, BearWise shares ways to prevent conflicts, provides resources to resolve problems, and encourages community initiatives and ordinances (i.e., wildlife-resistant trash storage, pet food storage, necessity for clean barbecue grills and bear-resistant deployment of bird feeders) to keep bears wild. Numerous communities throughout North America apply BearWise practices. The result? Fewer conflicts between bears and humans.

Additionally, Maine's policy of bear baiting, acclimates bears to look for human food instead of foraging for their natural diet, which can contribute to human-bear conflict. Another reason that the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife should consider conducting a risk-benefit analysis of the state's bear baiting policy before considering any increases to the bear hunting season or bag limits.

Increased "opportunity"

The only other motivation for proposing L.D. 142 that comes to mind is to provide more "opportunity" for hunters and guides and additional revenue to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. This theory is confirmed by the choice in sponsor, Representative John Martin, registered Maine guide and owner of a hunting camp. As only 10+/- % of Maine citizens hunt and less than 2% trap, numbers that have been steadily declining over the years, it seems illogical to consider legislation that may have far reaching negative consequences and little benefit to increase prospects for a declining industry. MDIFW should instead focus on finding revenue streams that do not depend on killing animals, as that dependence creates conflict that consistently puts the Department's policy making at odds with actual science. We need to start basing our long-range wildlife policies on peer-reviewed science, as opposed to short-term economic gain, before it is too late.

In conclusion

Before any decisions are made to increase hunting seasons or bag limits for bear or any species of wildlife, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife MUST study how human food subsidies (baiting) effect the behavior of all wildlife, impact reproduction, and contribute to over-population and move to phase out our current bear baiting/feeding policy. To move forward otherwise would be ethically and ecologically irresponsible.

It is hard to imagine that Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is unaware of the connection between the state's bear baiting policy and increase in human/bear conflicts and bear population. But if the Department is uninformed of this connection, then the last thing we should do is grant bear season and bag limit rule-making authority to a commissioner and biologists that are not basing wildlife policy in documented science.

I urge members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to vote "ought not to pass" L.D. 1118, "An Act to Give the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Rule-Making Authority to Establish a Bear Season Framework and Bag Limits."

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Portland, ME

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