

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
IN SUPPORT OF 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”

SPONSORED BY: Representative MARTIN of Eagle Lake.

DATE OF HEARING: February 8, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department in support of **L.D. 142**.

This bill makes several changes to bear hunting and trapping, including:

- Authorizing the Commissioner to open the bear hunting season up to 1 week earlier than is currently allowed;
- Continue to limit the placement of bait for the purposes of hunting bear to no earlier than 30 days prior the first Monday preceding September 1st;
- Clarifying that in addition to determining the dates when hunting bear with bait is permitted during the general bear hunting season, the commissioner may adopt rules to set the dates when dogs may be used to hunt bear within the current general bear hunting season framework;
- Reducing the fee for a resident bear hunting permit and resident bear trapping permit from \$27 to \$10;
- Authorizing the commissioner to adopt rules governing the number of bears that may be hunted and trapped in a season, which may not be more than one by trapping or 2 in total, with a daily bag limit of one bear by hunting. A separate bear hunting permit would be required for each bear when the bag limit for bear hunting exceeds one.
- Providing that, beginning January 1, 2022, to obtain a bear trapping permit, a person must either have successfully completed a bear trapping education course or have previously held a valid Maine bear trapping permit in any year prior to 2022.

- Allowing a person to trap for bear under the authority of either a trapping license or a big game hunting license, and a bear trapping permit.

In 2017, the Department completed a comprehensive big game planning process that included black bears. This planning effort included extensive public consultation, a review of the status of bears in Maine, and incorporated the latest scientific information on bear management. The plan identifies several needs and priorities for bear management, which the Department is aggressively pursuing. As a result of this planning effort we have implemented web-based registration, are contracting with Cornell University to develop a new population model for bears, initiated a project to improve tracking of bear conflicts, continue to survey bear hunters, and are continuing our long-running efforts to monitor the health of the bear population by studying radio-collared bears. However, we currently lack the ability to achieve one of our most important objectives for bears in Maine: minimizing bear population growth in areas of higher human density.

While we are extremely fortunate to have one of the largest bear populations in the country, Maine's bear population has been growing steadily at 2-4% per year since 2005. As the bear population increases, it is also expanding further into central and southern Maine, where the potential for conflicts with humans is highest. It is imperative that we take steps to slow bear population growth in more urban areas by working to increase participation in bear hunting.

The changes outlined in this bill give the Department the ability to strategically increase bear hunting opportunities in order to achieve population goals. These changes are an important companion to our ongoing efforts to increase interest in bear hunting through marketing and education. Allowing the Commissioner the rule making authority to expand the bear hunting season by a week and increase the bag limit (to no more than 2 bears by hunting) provides the Department the ability to make bear season adjustments when necessary to meet publicly derived harvest and population objectives. We also expect that modifying bear permit fees and adjusting bear trapping license requirements will increase participation in bear hunting and trapping. Finally, by requiring new bear trappers to take a dedicated bear trapping education course, we will better prepare bear trappers to be successful.

During the 129th Legislature, this Committee considered an earlier version of this bill (L.D. 1118). L.D. 142 is essentially identical to the amended version of L.D. 1118, which was passed unanimously by the Committee last year but was not enacted in law due to early adjournment of the Legislature caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. We strongly encourage the Committee to support the comprehensive package of revisions to bear hunting and trapping contained in L.D. 142.

I would be happy to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.