



Wild Blueberry Commission OF MAINE

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Eric Venturini, Executive Director

Testimony in support of LD 142

An Act To Give the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Rule-making Authority To Establish a Bear Season Framework and Bag Limits

Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and esteemed members of the Committee On Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Eric Venturini and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, the voice of Maine's wild blueberry farms and businesses.

Every spring, Maine's wild blueberry growers import thousands of honey bee hives to help pollinate the wild blueberry crop. Without pollination, wild blueberry blossoms do not become fruit. These hives cost upwards of \$125 each. Consider that growers rent, or sometimes maintain their own honey bee hives, and place them in wild blueberry fields at a rate of 2 to 4 hives per acre. It is no surprise that pollination is the second highest operating cost to Maine's wild blueberry growers. Bears, just as the fables suggest, love honey. They also love the bee larvae that reside in these hives. Unfortunately, Maine's populous black bears often destroy not only our honey bee hives, but also bumble bee colonies, all in search of food. While most growers still rely on honey bee hives for pollination, many also, or instead, choose to purchase commercial bumble bees which come in a box and are placed out in fields during the spring pollination season. Growers spend their most valuable asset, time, and their second most valuable asset, money, protecting both commercial bumble bee and honey bee hives with electric fencing and other systems to protect them from nuisance bears. Unfortunately, a determined bear can often rip right through any protections that have been put into place by the farmer. Some employ professionals to catch and release the bears (who nevertheless often return to fields several times).

Management of Maine's bear population is best done by those who dedicate their careers to the task at the Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife. To best manage bear populations while considering the differing needs of towns, farms, and the stakeholders that interact with bears, the Department requires the flexibility to make rules suited to the task. Rulemaking will enable the department to better control bear populations in high conflict areas – including Downeast and coastal counties where nuisance bears are a major economic problem for wild blueberry growers.

The Wild Blueberry Commission supports the passage of this bill, and thanks Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and the Committee On Inland Fish and Wildlife for their time and consideration.