

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 257**

LD TITLE: “An Act To Expand the Hunting Season for Deer”

PRESENTED BY: Representative PARRY of Arundel.

DATE OF HEARING: February 17, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 257**.

This bill would expand the regular firearms and regular archery seasons on deer. This bill is currently a concept draft, but our understanding is that the intent is to lengthen the regular firearms and regular archery seasons in order to spread the deer harvest out over a longer period. This would lessen the burden on meat cutters who sometimes must turn customers away during periods of high harvest and high demand for meat cutting services.

The impacts of lengthening deer hunting seasons would be broad and should only be considered if there is strong evidence that it is necessary to effectively manage Maine’s deer population. Longer seasons would likely increase the proportion of antlerless deer permits that are successfully filled, which would require the Department to reevaluate allocation strategies and compensate by issuing fewer permits in many Wildlife Management Districts. While we could recalibrate permit allocations over time to maintain acceptable levels of antlerless harvest, lengthening these seasons would also result in an increase in buck harvest, potentially impacting the Department’s ability to accurately assess metrics of population health and stability. This could lead to disparity in both age and sex structure in our deer population in many parts of the State. Additionally, we are concerned that longer deer hunting seasons may not be supported by private landowners, or cause conflicts between hunters or with non-hunters that have grown accustomed to our current hunting season framework. Adding additional time to the regular firearms season into December would direct hunting pressure on deer during their yarding period and concentrate hunting effort into smaller habitat patches; thus creating additional conflicts with landowners and a perception of fair-chase issues. Similarly, starting deer hunting seasons earlier in the fall would increase the amount of overlap with bear, moose, and upland game hunters, likely leading to conflicts between these hunters.

The Department recognizes that finding a place to have wild game animals prepared and packaged for consumption can be challenging. There has been a decline in the number of

businesses offering this service, and some of those that continue to operate occasionally turn customers away due to a lack of capacity. We believe this is a complex issue that can be addressed through several related approaches, including taking steps to better connect hunters and meat cutters, promoting meat cutting as a business opportunity, and increasing the number of hunters that cut and package their own game animals. The Department's R3 program has recently offered several in-person and virtual seminars to better prepare hunters to process their own deer, and we are currently working on updates to our website that will improve the ability of hunters to find a meat cutter in their area.

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