

Randy Flannery, Owner, Wilderness Escape Outfitters, Danforth ME

**Testimony in Opposition of LD 544**

**An Act to Eliminate Moose Permits for Hunting Lodges**

**To**

**The Joint Stnding Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**

**March 15, 2021**

My name is Randy Flannery my wife Sharon and I own and operate Wilderness Escape Outfitters on Upper Hot Brook Lake, on the Washington, Aroostook County line, near Danforth, ME.

Wilderness Escape Outfitters is a full time, four season outfitting business, with a lakefront lodge and cabins catering to hunters for both big and small game, fishermen, and family vacationers.

We've worked very hard to build our outfitting business. We have always done everything by the book and built our business by operating within the letter of the law, in hopes of one day handing it down to our children. You are welcome to check with any game warden on our reputation.

With the decline of deer numbers, as well as deer hunters coming to Maine, and repeatedly having people tell us at Sportsman's Shows, they won't go deer hunting in Maine anymore because there are no deer in Maine anymore, I decided to start teaching our clients, tracking & stalking techniques, like my grandfather had taught me. It became an instant success and it didn't take long, for the word to get out about the success we were having. Field & Stream magazine contacted us and wrote their first article on us in the early 2000's, and have written at least one article a year on us since. Because Field & Stream is the world's largest outdoor publication other magazines, Outdoor Life, Deer & Deer Hunting, Buck Masters, and several other National publications started calling as well.

I was then hired by Field & Stream and Outdoor Life to do seminars for them, on Tracking & Stalking Whitetails, at all of their Sportsman's Show's. I then got hired by the NRA to do seminars for them at their Great American Sportsman's Show in Harrisburg, PA and other speaking engagements. My wife and I spend each year, from early January through early May traveling the country doing seminars.

In regards to the Outfitter Moose Tag's, I have heard, people have said, it isn't fair for the outfitter's to get those tags. They are taking those tags away from other people and all guides should get them. I couldn't disagree more!!

First of all, I have always felt, Maine, like many other states, should recognize and differentiate the definitive difference between an Outfitter and a guide or guide service. Whether it is by implementing an Outfitters's license to all legitimate, DHHS certified outfitters or not, I don't know. However, there are indeed definitive differences between a DHHS certified Outfitter who have built the ways and means to both house and feed and transport their clients, to a guide or guide service, operating out of a pickup truck!!

Besides my home state of Maine, over the years, I have also guided in Texas as well as the Rocky MTNs. The fact that I was a Registered Master Maine Guide with many years of experience was totally irrelevant in those states. It certainly mattered to the outfitters who had hired me, but to their states Board Of Outfitting & Guiding, it did not matter. The only thing that mattered to them was, all guides must work for a licensed outfitter. I am not saying Maine should be that strict but there should indeed be a designated description between an outfitter and a guide or guide service.

My wife and I started with nothing. We worked very hard, saved what we could and bought our land. We built our lodge ourselves. We lived in a camper, bathed in the lake, cooked on a gas grill, for two years. We built our lodge and cabins from scratch, by hand with our 12-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter and nobody ever gave us anything!!

We decided to do the research to learn exactly what we needed to do to become a legitimate licensed Maine Outfitter. I believe everyone had and has the same opportunity that we did!! What they choose to do with that opportunity is up to them! No one is stopping them!! They too can become a legitimate outfitting business instead of so many flying under the radar and hiding the fact that are actually feeding their clients without being licensed and certified, and or just operating their business out of their pickup truck. With the possibility of receiving an outfitter tag in the future, the expense of upgrades they have to make to get licensed can be recouped.

In regards to the comments about the outfitter tags taking away from other people. I don't feel that we outfitters are taking anything away from anyone! Besides, the number of outfitter tags sold each year is such a small number of tags anyway, it's not hurting anyone!!

Another thing I want to mention, I believe is almost completely overlooked. Most people do not realize the fact, that, Maine Outfitters are the greatest ambassadors the state of Maine has. Every year Maine outfitters spend their hard earned money traveling from state to state doing sportsman shows trying to get people to come to Maine to spend their money. Outfitters also pay hard earned money to put ads in magazines as well as paying for their internet websites and other forms of advertising, all to get people to come to Maine to spend their money. Outfitters are indeed, the greatest ambassadors the state of Maine has.

Another thing worth noting is, you never see any guide services or small operations buying booth space and advertising their guide services at Sportsman's Shows. You see the legitimate hard-working Maine outfitters who have invested their whole lives and continue to invest their whole lives and everything they make into their outfitting businesses. They sacrifice greatly every year to try to continue to stay in business as well as try to get people to come to Maine!! That fact should not be overlooked!!

What also should not be overlooked is the money we outfitters pour back into Maine's economy from the sale of these tags. Hard working outfitters pour everything we make back into our businesses and our communities. We also provide employment for our communities. We employ guides, kitchen staff, cleaning staff, maintenance staff, etc, and in many cases on these Outfitter Tags, we hire more than one guide for the hunt. We do this ourselves to try to give our clients, the best service and best Maine experience possible!!

Because we were hired to do seminars at so many, my wife and I probably do more sportsman shows than any other Maine Outfitter. One thing we see and hear, loud and clear is, people just, do not want to come to Maine to hunt deer anymore!! Maine has been surpassed by pretty much every other state in regards to people going there to deer hunt, because they are growing big deer everywhere now.

Before 1990 (When Ray Scott's Whitetail Institute started seeing the positive effects from his new food plot theories) if you wanted to shoot a 200+ pound buck you went to Maine. Now with the whole food plot craze being nation wide, people are going to other states where they manage their deer herd.

The decline of people coming to Maine anymore to hunt deer has hurt Maine Outfitter's tremendously. I guided for years for an Outfitter in the Patten area, who back in the 80's and early 90's, (when I guided for them) took in 40 deer hunters a week during the November deer season. Now, they are lucky if they get a half to a dozen hunter's for the whole month of November. These Outfitter Moose Tags help Maine Outfitters recoup some of the money they no longer receive from deer hunters.

I know with our own business, Wilderness Escape Outfitters, if we did not create our "Learn To Track & Stalk Hunt" and started teaching people how to go after their deer instead of sitting and waiting for them, we too, would probably have no deer hunters coming to our place either.

I've been a guide in Maine for a long time. In my guiding career for the most part managing the deer herd in Maine has been hoping they all don't die over the winter. That's not a real good management plan!! "What Is Not Resolved Will Be Repeated" An Old Japanese proverb. Worth noting here, if the state of Maine had listened to and taken former deer biologists Gerry Levine's advice, our deer herd would be in far better shape.

Unfortunately, the word of Maine not having anymore deer has spread from state to state and is out now. That is why people do not want to come to Maine anymore to hunt deer. Like I said the seminars I do are on deer hunting, tracking and stalking whitetails. People at the Sportsman's Show's talk to me about my deer hunting seminars, my deer hunting techniques, and about deer hunting. In regards to helping our deer herd, I believe I know how we can fix that problem!! However, that is another subject for another time. I will, however, be more than happy to discuss this with you all at a later date!! Please feel free to call me anytime! It would be my pleasure! I look forward to doing so!! My concern now is to save the outfitters tags in Maine because it is nothing but positive for the economy of Maine and helping the outfitters who do so much to help Maine's economy!! The Maine Outfitter Moose Tag is a great example of how the state of Maine and Maine Outfitters can work together, for the benefit of everyone!! Sincerely,

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