

**TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER**  
**IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 1012, "An Act To Fund Wildlife Rehabilitators"**  
**Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**  
**April 7, 2021**

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

Thank you for considering my testimony in strong support of L.D. 1012, "An Act To Fund Wildlife Rehabilitators. Thank you as well to the Girl Scout troop initiating this bill for understanding the value of the services wildlife rehabilitators contribute to our state.

These unsung heroes are on the front lines of human/wildlife conflict. They need and deserve funding, either through the Maine Outdoors Heritage Fund or another source identified by this committee. Considering the incredible role wildlife rehabilitators play, not only in saving animal lives, but also in community education, data collection and wildlife/habitat trend identification, providing broader access to state-level compensation for this work is long overdue.

Wildlife rehabilitators work seven days a week, 365 days per year, most of the time without compensation. Their work is physically and emotionally demanding. These rescuers save the lives of thousands injured and orphaned wild animals annually, while receiving no public / state funding. Most rely primarily on private donations. Many of the smaller rehabbers in rural areas operate out of pocket when funds are scarce. Without the dedication of Maine wildlife rehabilitators, many animals these animals would die horrible deaths with nowhere to go. Even with available licensed rehabbers in this state, some animals are turned away due to lack of space and resources.

**Services provided by wildlife rehabilitators**

Wildlife rescue - Wildlife rehabilitators save thousands of animals lives a year in Maine, however, saving the lives of injured or orphaned animals is only a fraction of the services these front-line rescuers provide.

Data collection & trend identification - Sadly, the survival rate of injured and orphaned wild animals brought to rehabilitators is low. However, as much is learned from the death of the animals as is from their survival. Through the observation, treatment, and necropsy of the animals in their care, wildlife rehabilitators collect important data and identify trends (population, habitat, disease) and environmental threats that would be difficult to identify or track without them.

Examples include:

- the poisoning of bald eagles from lead ammunition
- the dangers of lead sinkers to loons and other water birds
- identification of road mortality hot spots for migrating turtles
- tracking of white nose syndrome and its impact on the bat population
- identification of disease outbreaks (e.g., rabies, mange) in specific area

Data and trends identified by our wildlife rehabbers are shared with the Department of Inland, Fisheries and Wildlife, to help them form policy and act in a timely manner where needed.

Community outreach & education - Wildlife rehabilitators play an important role in educating their community on how to safely coexist with animals, how to protect their habitat and ways to avoid accidentally causing lethal harm to our wildlife neighbors.

**Caring for one sick animal can impact an entire population.** Treating an individual animal can have a great impact on an overall population, especially if there is a transmittable disease or environmental contamination issue identified in the process. These findings are not only important to wildlife conservation, but also to human health.

### **“Common” animals matter.**

Although many of the animals cared for by wildlife rehabilitators are considered by some to be “common” animals - every animal has an important role to play in maintaining healthy environment and ecosystems - all wild animal lives matter. Just because most of the animals helped by wildlife rehabilitators are not endangered, does not mean these species are not in danger. Pollution, environmental toxins, disease, habitat loss, place many species at risk. Wildlife rehabbers not only save lives of individual animals, but through the animals they treat, they also identify trends of disease, loss of habitat, environmental toxins, which keep "common" animal species safe, and off the endangered species list.

### **Is the MOHF the right funding source?**

Resources should not be taken away from protecting endangered species or wildlife habitats in Maine. However, in reviewing the approved projects lists for MOHF from 2020, I see funded initiatives that work *against* conservation and would have been more appropriately funded by municipalities or not at all. Projects such as building public docks for boats and sea planes on Moosehead lake (\$16,000) or “Invasive Species Management” aka dispersing toxic pesticides and herbicides into our environment to kill terrestrial species (\$14,500). Also noted is funding going to a project requested by an out-of-state organization (Audubon Society of New Hampshire, \$15,000). Personally, I would have preferred to see these funds go to Maine wildlife rehabilitators.

It is natural that past grantees may not want more competition for existing funds, especially when available funding has decreased over the last year. At least these organizations were able to access some financial support, whereas others were left without. Although funds are limited on many fronts, it is important to support each other efforts in the quest for protecting wildlife, land, water, and our environment.

In closing, I ask the committee members to consider the important contributions that Maine wildlife rehabilitators make to our wildlife and habitat protection efforts. Although the MOHF may or may not be the appropriate funding vehicle for this effort, I hope that the Committee will direct the Department, perhaps with the guidance of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Council, to identify financial support avenues for these critical frontline wildlife conservationists.

Thank you for your consideration.

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