

Dear Senator Dill, Representative Landry and members of the Committee of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

I am writing to you today in opposition of LD 1033 which would open all 52 Sundays to hunting.

Maine enjoys rich hunting opportunities throughout the year, our implied permission structure grants outdoor recreation participants access to private land in pursuit of outdoor activity.

That permission also pertains to hunting, already under Maine law, resident and non-resident hunters enjoy access to millions of acres unless it is posted. Posting land requires the boundary to be accurately surveyed, as tax maps and even GPS map apps are more commonly wrong than accurate. Coupled with the cost of enough posted signs or purple paint and posts to mark the property line every 100 feet and the annual maintenance to clear the line of brush and obstructions, posting one's land is a costly and time consuming endeavor. Many landowners forgo this process as they are happy to share their property with others, including hunters as they can currently enjoy their land during the hunting seasons one day a week free of hunting pressure.

LD 1033 would create two sets of laws for the same activity, asking for permission to hunt one day a week while the other six do not require landowner permission, creating a confusing double standard. This legislation would place the burden of enforcement on the landowner, requiring them to survey and mark the boundary of their property in order to prevent hunter encroachment and ensure prosecution of those that do cross over their line to prevent claims by trespassers that they did not see the boundary. This legislation will also require non hunting landowners and recreationists to wear blaze orange 7 days a week while outdoors throughout firearm season as a precaution. Even if landowners do not allow hunting on their land, should an adjacent landowner allow it there will be risk and precautions will be needed.

This legislation will put undue strain on hunter and non-hunting landowner relationships as hunters have six days a week during the seasons to enjoy non posted land in pursuit of their sport where non-hunters only get one. More non-hunting landowners who previously did not mind hunters accessing their property will now need to mark their boundary line and could potentially post their land, restricting access and reducing hunting and all outdoor recreation opportunities. There is also concern that the large timber management companies that own millions of acres of land in Maine will close access to their holdings year round as they have previously stated during past legislations to open Sunday hunting.

Maine hunters already have ample opportunity to pursue their sport. During whitetail season alone Maine residents have 61 days of hunting starting in late September, with 25 during regular firearm season, 12 during black powder and 24 during archery. Should expanded archery be included there are 79 days for hunters to engage in their sport while non hunters have 14 days during the same time to enjoy their outdoor activities free of hunting pressure. With the additional seasons on other game animals hunters can pursue such as snowshoe hare or spring bear and turkey, hunters have 201 days to pursue their sport where non hunters have 26. This also does not include all of the time in the woods hunters can spend scouting for game, preparing their blind/stands, managing habitat, training themselves or hunting dogs.

The rising numbers in both deer harvests and hunter participation show interest in hunting and the success rates are growing. During the 2020 season, hunters harvested 33,127 deer, the highest number since 2002 and archery hunters tagged 3,200 deer which normally averages 2,000 annually. Hunter participation also grew in 2020 with 8.2% more licenses issued and hunters by average spent an extra day in the field.

Another consideration this legislation fails to address is the potential long term impacts on wildlife conservation. Over the past 10 years hunters have either met, exceeded or been just under the projected harvest quotas for whitetail made by DIFW. Maine is at the northernmost range of whitetail deer, where weather, food sources and winter conditions can have a significant effect on decreasing their populations. Should harvests begin to increase, there could be potential for lowered harvest numbers, limited tag availability and possibly even a shortened season. A thorough examination should be undertaken to understand the potential long term impacts of this legislation and any others that an increase in hunting days will have on the sustainability of wildlife herds.

It is understood that the "blue law" on the prohibition of hunting on Sundays was made during a time when the majority of the populace attended religious services and did not work the schedules of our current time. As our society has evolved so too has our hunting and non-hunting traditions, which includes the reservation of Sunday that many non-hunters now use as a day during the pristine fall weather of Maine to pursue their chosen outdoor activities. While the majority of hunters work and only have a select few days to pursue their sport so too do non-hunters. Resident hunters make up 9.74% of Maine's population, in fairness it should not be up to the other 90.26% of residents that do not hunt to supplement others activity by providing an extra 10 days of the season that they usually spend enjoying the outdoors free of hunting pressure. Should the 4 Saturdays and Thanksgiving during firearm season not be enough for hunters, the majority of employers offer vacation time and there is also black powder and archery seasons that provide an additional 6 Saturdays to pursue their sport. The responsibility of making the time to pursue one's passion is that of the individual, not taking the time that has traditionally been reserved for others to pursue their recreational activities.

LD 1033 could lead to fewer hunting opportunities through the creation of more posted land, including closure of public access to the millions of acres owned by timber management companies. They could endanger the sustainability of Maine's wildlife herd through increased harvests and have potential to lower bag limits and shorten Maine's hunting seasons.

These concerns and others need to be considered before any increase to hunting seasons is enacted, including opening all 52 Sundays of the year. I would suggest the following procedures to ensure the longevity of Maine's hunting traditions and implied access structure,

- An examination by DIFW on how much of an increase in harvests could be sustainable.
- The formation of a stakeholders committee to study how landowners, large and small, would receive opening Sunday hunting to determine how it would affect access to private land.
- An examination of what safety precautions would need to be in place, such as requiring the landowner that allows Sunday hunting on their property to undertake the process of marking their boundaries to prevent hunters from crossing into non-hunting land and non-hunters from crossing into hunting land, while also prohibiting discharge of a firearm within 100 yards of the boundary.

I hope you will consider these procedures and not recommend this legislation be forwarded to the legislature as written as it risks long term opportunity for short term gains and is a bad policy for Maine. LD 1033 will severely hinder the great strides hunters have made in the last decade with landowner relations, success rates and growing the hunting population and only damage the delicate balance of implied permission between hunters and non-hunting landowners.

Thank you for your time,

Tyler Brown  
*Hunter, Land Steward*