

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 1212**

“An Act To Allow Sunday Hunting North of U.S. Route 2 from the New Hampshire Border to Bangor, North of Route 9 from Bangor to the Canadian Border and within That Portion of the White Mountain National Forest inside the State”

Presented by Representative ORDWAY of Standish.

DATE OF HEARING: April 21, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Resource Management Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking in opposition to **L.D. 1212**.

This bill allows persons to hunt wild animals and wild birds on Sunday north of U.S. Route 2 from the New Hampshire border to Bangor, north of Route 9 from Bangor to the Canadian border and within any portion of the White Mountain National Forest in the State. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is directed to adopt rules to implement this provision.

The issue raised by the introduction of this bill is truly a social issue that strikes individuals personally with almost everyone having an opinion on this. The points of view are not necessarily predictable and vary within land ownership status, recreational interests and even among hunters. The discussion crosses lines of personal liberty and landowner rights. The Administration does understand that Sunday hunting could provide potential economic growth and additional opportunity to hunters. At the same time, we recognize that many landowners prefer to have Sunday as a day that they can enjoy their land and allow other stewards opportunity to recreate. The Department is sensitive to the concerns of private landowners. Maine is more than 90% privately owned and without the support and generosity of our private landowners, our outdoor recreational opportunities would be severely limited. We have also been contacted by landowners where they express concerns that they not be made the “bad guys” in the decision on whether or not Sunday Hunting is allowed. I’m sure you will also hear testimony from landowners who feel they should be allowed to decide when and where to use their land.

We would also point out that establishing a zone line for this purpose in a populated area of the state will result in conflicts with landowners and sportsmen as individuals cross the road or go to an adjacent town to take advantage of the additional hunting opportunity. This occurs in the situation this bill would create where there isn’t any opportunity afforded in one place and it is offered nearby. This is different from varying bag limits in adjoining WMDs where opportunity exists in either place and there is less incentive to move to an unfamiliar area. In the early days of restricting the harvest of antlerless deer, a similar north south split was instituted and did create a movement of hunters to areas they didn’t normally hunt and conflicts with landowners resulted. This was done away with and eventually the current antlerless permit system was instituted.

Currently Saturdays are the Maine Warden Service’s busiest days regarding calls for service in the fall (Sept. 1 – December 15). Calls for service on Saturdays are on average a minimum of 61% greater than the other 5 days of the week. We expect another weekend day of hunting would mimic

a Saturday and wardens would see significant increase in calls for service. Currently Sunday is often used as a day to complete paperwork and follow-up with the complaints and investigations wardens respond to on Saturday, using Sunday as a day to catch people at home and avoid contacting them at their workplaces.

We have reached out to a few states and can offer the following points:

Instituting Sunday hunting affects migratory bird hunting including waterfowl hunting, which is regulated by a framework provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Currently nonhunting Sundays in Maine can be compensated for by adding a hunting day at the end of the season, thereby increasing the overall length of the season. Migration occurs over a period of time and having an extended season allows hunters to access different species and hunting conditions across the state. For this reason, some states have limited Sunday hunting to deer hunting. A shortened season would require the Department to change the waterfowl seasons as they currently exist. This change is not something that can be instituted immediately and would likely require a year after passage of a bill to coordinate the changes with the USFWS.

At this point the states we have talked to have not documented an increase in harvest as a result of Sunday hunting. Neither have any states documented an overall increase in participation due to Sunday hunting, although some new studies are underway to examine this issue. Several states pointed out that Sunday hunting has allowed hunters to quickly offset the lost opportunity to bad weather on an opening Saturday. Looking at daily harvest records in New Hampshire it also appears Sunday is the day of choice for some hunters to be out as well. In conclusion I would say this information reinforces this as a social issue not a biological discussion.

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