



BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS
NEW ENGLAND

April 18, 2021

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1033 - An Act To Allow Sunday Hunting on Private Property with the Written Permission of the Landowner and LD 1054 - An Act To Allow Hunting on Sundays with Written Consent on Private Property

Dear Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and Members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting by supporting land conservation, public access to hunting and fishing areas, fair chase, and the sound management of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

On behalf of BHA's Maine members we are testifying neither for nor against LD 1033 and LD 1054. We would like to briefly discuss some of the reasons why some form of Sunday hunting makes sense, and our recommendations for a path forward.

Public access and opportunity for hunters & anglers are core issues for BHA, and Sunday hunting in Maine directly relates to these tenets. Adding Sundays to hunting seasons would increase opportunities for working-age and youth hunters to become engaged in hunting and conservation. However, we also know that roughly 94% of Maine's forestland is privately owned and more than half of that land allows public access for recreational use. We recognize that groups representing private landowners have indicated that Sunday hunting may result in a reduction in land area open to traditional public access for recreation, and we are concerned about this potential loss of public access to private lands.

Ten states have eliminated or loosened restriction on Sunday hunting, leaving Maine as one of only two states in the US that does not allow Sunday hunting. Lack of opportunity is often cited as a reason by many hunters who give up hunting. Sunday hunting would provide more opportunities to hunt, and increased revenues from license sales would help support DIFW's programs. A 2011 study found that if most Sunday hunting restrictions were eliminated, over 2,500 hunters in Maine would likely have been recruited or retained by 2016, resulting in over



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\$850,000 in revenue for DIFW. Maine's retail and tourism economy would also benefit from more hunting opportunity; in 2013 the average Maine hunter spent \$1,429, including \$554 on travel expenses. As of 2016 this would have amounted to an increase in hunter spending of over \$3.5 million annually by the 2,500 additional hunters who would have been recruited or retained over five years if Sunday hunting had been allowed.

The New England Chapter of BHA encourages the Committee seek information on the impact of Sunday Hunting on harvest rates and season lengths. Currently Maine hunters are fortunate to have a regular firearms deer season of 25 days. This is the same season length as New Hampshire and longer than the other New England states. Because New Hampshire allows Sunday hunting, it has a total of 10 weekend days and holidays during its firearms season, whereas Maine has seven. In contrast, Vermont, which also allows Sunday hunting, has the same number of weekend days and holidays as Maine but a season length of only 16 days. In southern New England firearms seasons are shorter than Maine and only provide from 2 to 6 days of weekend or holiday hunting. Allowing Sunday hunting in Maine's current four week firearms season would add five weekend days to the current season. This could cause DIFW to issue fewer antlerless permits or recommend a shorter season to compensate for increased harvest on the added Sundays.

Another consideration is Maine's long custom of open access to northern timberlands, a tradition that is almost non-existent outside of New England, and woodland owners and farmers often grant verbal permission. With over 90% percent of Maine's forest land and 100% of farmland privately owned, the vast majority of Maine hunters rely on access to private land for hunting. While this bill would allow Sunday hunting only on private land with written permission, both owners of large and small properties could be burdened with a large number of requests for access and tracking permissions. We encourage the Committee to consider the impacts to private landowners and seek modifications to the bill that might mitigate some of these concerns.

Recreational users and non-hunters are also likely to testify against Sunday hunting because they prefer one day a week during the regular deer season when there are no guns in the woods. Although the number of hunting accidents has declined significantly after hunter safety programs were required and accidents affecting non-hunters are rare, even one is not acceptable. While the safety discussion usually focuses on firearms season for deer, Maine's Archery & Expanded Archery seasons for deer, Spring & Fall turkey and small game seasons are less controversial in regard to safety. These seasons should be considered for Sunday hunting by the Committee.

BHA's Maine members recognize that there are strong opinions about potential changes to the prohibition of Sunday hunting in Maine. We encourage the Committee to consider ways to allow Sunday hunting opportunities while possibly addressing concerns you will hear from the opponents of Sunday hunting. Here are just a few ways that Maine could offer Sunday hunting opportunities:



1. **Sunday hunting during archery seasons.** The primary Sunday hunting objection is to firearms hunting during the regular deer season. Pending an analysis of the impact on season lengths and/or antlerless permits, \BHA would support a change in regulations that would allow archery hunting on Sundays, as is the case in Connecticut.
2. **Hunting on Sundays in the unorganized townships and the White Mountain National Forest.** For many working hunters and hunting families the long drive required to hunt in the Maine Woods is not worth it for a single day of weekend hunting, and weekday hunts may not be an option. Hunting in Maine's northern timberlands typically occurs far from hiking trails and would not affect farmers, woodlot owners. Because timber operations are generally not active on Sundays, issues with logging road traffic would be minimal. Within the White Mountain National Forest the potential for conflicts between hikers and other recreationists is minimal. Hiking areas are clearly identified and could be easily avoided by hunters, and most hiking trails are not located where hunters are likely to go.
3. **Limit the number of Sunday's open for hunting.** For example, in 2019 the Pennsylvania General Assembly approved three Sunday hunting days, including one each in the firearms and archery deer seasons and a third to be chosen by the State Game Commission.

As a path forward, we encourage the Committee to charge the Department to work on identifying Sunday hunting opportunities, and we would be happy to participate in a working group on this issue that includes the Department, landowners, recreationists, and other hunting groups.

Sincerely,

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