



SAM-ILA (Institute for Legislative Action)
205 Church Hill Road, Suite 1, Augusta, Maine 04330-8210
Telephone: (207)623-4589
e-mail: david.trahan@sportsmansallianceofmaine.org
www.sportsmansallianceofmaine.org

Testimony - Support

LD 404, An Act to Preserve Deer Habitat

Presented by David Trahan, Executive Director of SAM-ILA

May 5, 2021

The honorable Senator Dill, Representative Landry, members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, my name is David Trahan, I am the Executive Director of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, Institute for Legislative Action testifying in enthusiastic support of LD 404, An Act to Preserve Deer Habitat. This is a SAM-ILA bill and our highest priority for the session. We would like to thank Rep. Johansen for sponsoring this important bill and asking the SAM-ILA to spearhead an effort to protect deer yards in northern, eastern and western Maine.

Since this concept draft was introduced, several groups and individuals contributed to the proposed amendment. We would like to thank the Governor's staff, Jeff Romano from Maine Coast Heritage Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, especially Wildlife Division Director, Nate Webb, Rep. Theriault and respected deer biologist, Gerry Lavigne for their contributions to this draft.

In the 1950's and 60's, Maine's deer population was at a healthy level-statewide and Whitetail deer were the foundation and cultural anchor of many rural communities. Coyotes were someone else's problem and if you wanted to hunt big bucks in Maine, you went north. Since that time, things have changed dramatically. Whitetail deer have been almost eradicated in parts of northern Maine. Coyotes are well established throughout Maine and the line where deer populations remain healthy continues to sink southward.

Three things have changed since the glory days, coyotes and black bears have expanded their populations and established themselves as the top two predators on deer and deer wintering areas (DWA's) on the landscape have shrunk from 12 percent of the land mass to 3 percent. In our opinion, this dramatic decline in deer

wintering areas is a major factor in the overall decline of deer in rural regions of the state, predation is a close second.

IFW currently owns 100,000 acres of wildlife management areas, with very limited deer wintering areas. This legislation directs the Department to identify priority deer yards in specific regions of the state and based on the department's priorities, seek these yards for purchase and management as department owned deer wintering areas. This legislation gives the Department clear legislative direction to add deer yards to their land management portfolio.

This legislation strengthens the Land for Maine's Future program statute to prioritize the purchase of deer yards and places protections on the sale agreements to ensure, at the time of closing, the deer yard still exists; furthermore, the legislation places deed restrictions on the property to protect it as a deer yard into perpetuity. It also establishes a deer yard management plan and allows up to five percent of the LMF proceeds to pay for the plan.

LD 404, requires an annual report to the committee on progress, limits or manages deer feeding around the Departments deer yards and finally, amends the Maine Deer Management account to reflect these acquisition changes. Finally, funding, although most of these new provisions are linked to a future Land for Maine's Future bond, it is not exclusive. We understand the Department will need funding to successfully accomplish these bold new policy directions. We ask the committee, if you vote to pass this bill, send an additional letter to the Department and ask them to have the study commission directed to overhaul the antlerless deer permit system to examine potential funding sources within the permit system that could be used to bolster the Maine Deer Management Fund.

When I started working on this bill, I asked the stakeholders involved to "Go Big or Go Home!" I ask the Committee to do the same. This bill is crucial to restoring deer throughout Maine, it has the potential to bring economic growth for communities in desperate need and if successful, bring a keystone species back to its historic range.