

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST**

L.D. 1991: “An Act Related to the Electronic Registration and Tagging of Big Game”

L.D. 1992: “An Act Related to the Electronic Registration and Tagging of Turkey”

REPORTED BY: Representative LANDRY of Farmington

DATE OF HEARING: February 28, 2022

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 on behalf of the Commissioner and the Department, neither for nor against **LD 1991 and LD 1992.**

The Department has presented testimony previously on this topic so I will attempt to be brief but clarify the issues surrounding this topic. To start the titles of both bills are confusing because currently the Department has a system in place that successfully supports the electronic registration or tagging of wild turkeys, deer, bear, and moose. The Department’s current electronic registration system supports the Department’s management needs. It allows in-person game registration at local stores that serve as tagging stations and benefit from the additional patronage of hunters tagging their game. The Department has also worked with registered guides that meet certain qualifications to electronically tag animals which has benefited these guides and their clients while still supporting the Department’s big game management program. It is important to note the current system supports the ability for Maine Warden Service to enforce the laws and rules governing hunting in Maine. At the Legislature’s request the Department has expanded the network of tagging stations to better serve in person registration of turkeys, deer, bear, and moose by hunters.

The system proposed in LD 1991 and 1992 would allow hunters to electronically self-report and register the wild turkeys, deer, bear, and moose that they have harvested. The self-reporting system does not provide the same support for the Department’s management needs as the current electronic registration system. For this reason, the Department is testifying Neither for Nor Against LD 1991 and 1992 today. The Department, if directed could implement a system for the electronic self-reporting of turkeys as outlined in LD 1992. There are some modifications that are necessary to implement this system including addressing the issues we detailed in the Oral Testimony to the Committee, a copy of which is attached as Appendix A (beginning on page 3) such as eliminating paper licenses. The Department also pointed out the lack of current contact information for many complimentary and lifetime license holders which hinders our ability to monitor hunter effort and success. These issues can be overcome but that will take additional time to make the required changes. In Appendix B

(beginning on page 5) included in this testimony and that was included in our report back to the Legislature on electronic tagging, we did outline the need to expend additional money (up to \$40,000 annually) and staff time to gather the data needed to responsibly manage wild turkeys while allowing the self-reporting of harvested turkeys.

The Department is opposed to LD 1991 as it is currently written which would allow for the electronic self-reporting and registering of deer, bear, and moose. The Department believes with the changes it has previously shared with the committee, an electronic self-reporting system for registering of deer in central and southern Maine could be established. These changes would require expending additional money (estimated at \$68,400 annually) as well as staff time and direct loss in revenue from the elimination of in-person tagging. A portion of the revenue from the tagging of deer would normally be deposited in the Deer Management Fund causing a reduction in the money available for deer management. The Department would recommend that the system of self-reporting of your harvested deer be limited to the areas of the state where deer are plentiful, and internet and cell phone service is strong. In northern, eastern and western Maine where deer populations are still recovering, we would still require in-person tagging to support the collection of biological data. For bear and moose the Department believes that allowing the self-reporting would negatively impact the Department's management of these species. The Department has previously testified that in-person electronic registration of these species supports the collection of the biological data needed to manage bear and moose. For this reason, we oppose including bear and moose in a self-reporting registration system as proposed in LD 1991. We would also point out that using the term big game as defined in this bill contradicts other sections of Title 12. Limiting the scope of the LD 1991 to deer would address this conflict.

In summary, if directed we can implement a system for the electronic self-reporting of wild turkeys and request that it include both spring and fall seasons. In-person registration of wild turkeys should continue to be allowed at in-person tagging stations. This will require changes in law and rule and the ongoing expenditure of additional staff time and money. The Department believes if we are directed to move forward with deer that a limited system for self-reporting of hunter harvested deer in central and southern Maine could be established. This will require some changes in the current statutes that would require action in the next legislative session. We have previously provided a timeline to the Committee that can be reworked to meet any directives the Department receives from this legislation.

The current electronic registration/tagging system allows the Department, working with private businesses as tagging stations to register wild turkeys, deer, bear, and moose easily and effectively. The current system also supports the collection of the biological information for these species that is necessary to guide management decisions. The stores that serve as tagging stations often are the economic drivers in their communities. During hunting seasons when hunters and non-hunters alike gather at these stores to admire a hunter's game these stores become social centers as well. We have heard from some store owners concerned about the loss of in-person tagging and wondering how it will affect them. The Department has asked them to share their concerns directly with their legislators. An important thing to understand is any self-reporting system will make enforcement of Maine's hunting laws and rules more challenging and in some cases limit their enforceability. It is also important to note we already have included some registered Maine guides as tagging stations for wild turkey, deer and bear now. In some specific circumstances, with additional training and a commitment by those guides to collecting biological data, their ability to register big game can be expanded to include moose. The Department can move towards an electronic self-reporting system for wild turkeys statewide and deer in central and southern Maine. This does require additional money, staff time and changes in law and rules. However, we would respectfully request that bear and moose not be included in that system as that would hinder the Department's management of these species. That concludes my testimony, and I would offer that members of the Department staff and the Commissioner are here and ready to

answer any questions the Committee may have.

Appendix A.

Oral Testimony on Self-Registration of Turkey and Deer

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Fish and Wildlife in February 2022

By: The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

- **Turkey Self-Registration:** As we have outlined in previous discussions, the Department feels that it would be relatively straightforward to create an electronic self-reporting option for hunters to register harvested wild turkeys, with minimal impact on other areas of statute or rule. We anticipate using a reward-banding program to estimate compliance with registration and would also need to address increase demand for technical support by the thousands of hunters that we expect would use the system each year. There would be no direct financial loss to the Department because turkey registration fees are retained by the tagging agent and do not come to the Department.
- **Deer Self-Registration:** For deer, the statutory changes required to simply allow electronic self-reporting are relatively simple, and Julia will review draft versions of these changes in a few minutes. However, ensuring the system works well for hunters and for the Department's ability to manage this important resource will require review and consideration of numerous other areas of statute, Department rule, policy, and operational practices. As we've discussed previously, these include the currently proposed statutory changes to the antlerless deer system and use of crossbows in archery seasons. We would recommend limiting this system to areas to central and southern Maine and continue to require in-person registration in northern eastern and western Maine.
- **Considerations outside of statute:** In addition, the Department believes several other changes to our licensing and permit framework would be required, including:
 1. Ensuring all hunters have their profile loaded into the Department's electronic licensing system (no more paper licenses)
 2. Ensuring we have current contact information for all hunters permitted to harvest antlerless deer so we can survey them to evaluate compliance with registration (requiring lifetime license renewal and landowners to acquire a license)
 3. Ensuring that all hunters with a license that includes deer hunting permits at no additional charge are required to apply for and obtain these permits (require permits in all circumstances).
- **Paper licenses and permits:** Currently some hunters purchases their licenses in a paper format. The authorities granted by these licenses and permits are not immediately loaded into the Department's electronic licensing system (MOSES). Since one of the purposes of our system of registering big game is to ensure that the hunter has the legal authority to harvest the animal,

these hunters would not be able to electronically self-report their harvests. Therefore, we propose eliminating the sale of paper licenses and permits in order to allow all hunters the option of self-reporting their harvests. This would require changes to Department rules Chapter 16 (Hunting) and Chapter 21 (Licensing and Registration Agents).

- **Contact Information:** In order for the Department to survey hunters to estimate compliance with self-reporting, we would need to address the long-standing issue of not having current contact information for lifetime and some complementary license holders, as well as the fact landowners hunting on their own land do not require a license at all. In order to address this, we would propose that all holders of lifetime and complementary licenses renew their license each year they intend to use it, and we would also propose that landowners that are currently able to hunt on their own land without a license to obtain a license from the Department (at no cost). This would allow us to survey these hunters to determine whether they harvested a deer and compare this with the registration database, and would also provide information on the numbers of these hunters that are actually active in a particular year. As a side benefit, these changes would also make it easier for us to contact hunters to collect biological samples (if required), and to provide them with information on laws, rules, and other updates. As the Department's communications have increasingly shifted towards electronic outreach methods (e.g. digital lawbooks, Gov Delivery emails etc.), it has become more important than ever for us to know how many active hunters we have and be able to contact them. As a recent example of this, our consumption advisory for deer in the Fairfield area last fall could only be sent to those hunters that we had current contact information for. Again, I want to stress that although we believe these changes would be important for ensuring an electronic self-reporting system for deer works well, they would also address numerous other long-standing challenges with lifetime and complementary hunters and landowners. These groups are currently a 'shadow' population of hunters, and we lack information on how many are actually hunting, whether they are still residents of Maine, and even whether they are still alive. I do want to point out that operationalizing these changes would be complex as the Department would need to develop a system to allow these hunters to easily renew or obtain licenses at no cost to them, while also providing a way for those hunters uncomfortable using an electronic system to renew or obtain a license via phone or in person. These are all issues that the Department would need more time to consider and address.
- **Permits:** Currently, permits to hunt antlerless deer are included with some hunting licenses (e.g. youth, seniors, disabled veteran, tribal). This makes it impossible for the Department to efficiently survey hunters to determine whether they actually hunted antlerless deer, and if they did, whether or not they harvested one. Therefore, in order for us to be able to accurately estimate compliance with self-reporting of deer harvests, we would propose that holders of licenses for which a permit to hunt antlerless deer is included be required to apply for and obtain these permits from the Department, at no additional cost. This will give us accurate information on the number of hunters actually participating in the hunting of antlerless deer. Similar to the issue with lifetime licenses, this is a multifaceted issue and this change would also address other long-standing challenges that the Department has had in determining the number of active hunters for antlerless deer and efficiently contacting them to provide them with information or survey them. Because of these benefits, we would suggest that if this change is made for deer, that it is

also made for other situations where a permit (e.g. turkey, bear, muzzleloader etc.) is included in a hunting license so we can determine participation in these activities.

- Thoroughly considering these issues and developing statutory, policy, and operational changes to address them will take a significant amount of time. Therefore, if the Committee does want to move forward with electronic self-reporting for deer, we would request the opportunity to come back to the Committee in January 2023 with proposed changes to the statutory framework for hunting licenses and permits and to carefully consider all of the other operational aspects associated with these changes.
- Although addressing these issues are critical for a self-reporting registration for deer, they would also benefit a self-reporting system for wild turkey. Therefore, if the Legislature decides to move forward with electronic self-reporting of deer AND turkey, we would request that these issues are addressed for both species. We feel it would be inefficient and confusing for hunters if we developed a system to allow self-reporting for wild turkey, only to develop second system for deer a year later. Therefore, if the Committee does want to move forward for both species, we strongly recommend a delay in the timeline for allowing self-reporting of turkey until these changes can be made. In other words, we feel we could move forward with a system for turkey alone in 2023, but implementing a system for both species should occur in 2024.

Other considerations:

- Lost revenue from tagging fees
- Potential decline in the number of in-person stations
- Additional staff required to provide technical assistance and collect biological data
- Additional funding required to collect biological data and survey hunters
- Enforcement & Compliance Challenges

Appendix B.

Table 2. Estimated costs to implement electronic big game registration. Note that surveys may be conducted at multi-year intervals.

Species	Action	Estimated Cost
Bear	Tooth envelopes and instructions in hunting license mailing	\$1,000
	Mailing tooth envelopes to Registered Guides	\$5,000
	Tooth envelopes, self-addressed stamped return envelope, and instructions in hunting license mailing	\$10,000+ postage for return mailing
	Staff visits to hunter residences (6 individuals x 8 work weeks x \$20/hr)	\$38,400
	Staff time to design study to estimate reporting rate and make necessary adjustments to management system and integrated population model	\$10,000
	Survey (email) and analysis to determine registration compliance rate	\$5,000
	TOTAL BEAR	\$69,400
Deer	Collecting bio data in Northern, Eastern Maine – staff visits to hunter residences (12 individuals x 2 work weeks x \$20/hr)	\$38,400

	Tooth envelopes and instructions, self-addressed stamped return envelope in hunting license mailing	\$10,000+ postage for return mailing
	Survey (email) to determine registration compliance rate	\$10,000
	Staff time to design study to estimate reporting rate and make necessary adjustments to management system	\$10,000
	TOTAL DEER	\$68,400
Moose	Staffing for roadside biological check stations (8 individuals x 3 work weeks x \$40/hr)	\$38,400
	Equipment for roadside check stations	\$6,000
	Staffing for kill-site visits to collect ovaries (6 individuals x 2 work weeks x \$40/hr)	\$19,200
	Survey (email) to determine registration compliance rate	\$5,000
	Staff time to design study to estimate reporting rate and make necessary adjustments to management system	\$10,000
	TOTAL MOOSE	\$69,000
Wild Turkey	Capture/banding of birds to create a marked sample to estimate registration compliance rate	\$27,000
	Hunter survey to estimate registration compliance	\$3,000
	Staff time to design study to estimate reporting rate and make necessary adjustments to management system	\$10,000
	TOTAL TURKEY	\$40,000
Combined	InforMe to design and test web-based system (Amazon Web Services) multiple browsers supported, functional on smartphone, tablet, computer	\$ no additional cost anticipated
	Staffing of telephone lines to answer questions from hunters/assist with registration throughout fall hunts (2 individuals x 12 work weeks x \$20/hr)	\$19,200
	Lost Revenue from Waived Registration Fees	\$60,000
	GRAND TOTAL	\$316,400