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Testimony - Support

LD 1965, An Act to Create Higher Standards for State-owned and State Managed Land for Deer Management

Presented by David Trahan, Executive Director of SAM-ILA

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The Honorable Senator Dill, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, my name is David Trahan, and I am testifying in support of *LD 1965, An Act to Create Higher Standards for State-owned and State Managed Land for Deer Management*. We would like to thank Senator Jackson for sponsoring this bill on behalf of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine-Institute for Legislative Action.

This bill was generated by concerns related to a recent timber harvest conducted on the Hamlin, BPL lot in southeastern Aroostook County. As originally proposed, this timber harvest was slated to cut 85 percent of a 1,000-acre public lot. This original cut upset local residents as it was one of the last remaining older growth forests in the region and many believed a valuable deer wintering area and brook trout fishery. After several site visits between local residents, and changes to the project by the Department of Conservation, the lot has been harvested.

What this controversial harvest did reveal was a serious conflict in statutory policy at BPL to generate revenue from timber harvests that fund some of their on-going programs and their responsibility to manage deer wintering areas that support deer, but also, dozens of other unique wildlife species. When this issue first came to my attention, I asked the department, (IFW), if there were deer wintering areas on the property? The answer was no, but does that mean there were no deer wintering areas on the Hamlin lot? The answer is no. I asked the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for recent winter deer survey data on this lot and their answer was, there is none. If BPL had been required to do such survey work prior to the Hamlin lot harvest, we wouldn't be here today.

The truth is, BPL has many public woodlots that are used to generate millions in timber revenue, and it appears wildlife habitat management or recreation is not the highest priority for some lots. That is not the fault of BPL as these policies are determined through a public input planning process and Legislative policy direction. This system is failing in some parts of the state.

Ironically, as the Hamlin BPL lot was being proposed for a very aggressive cut (the local community did not support) the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife was under new Legislative mandate to seek, purchase and manage deer wintering areas in the same region.

Unfortunately, there is not enough time in this shortened second session to properly address this issue with a Concept Draft, but I do believe LD 1965 could be used as a vehicle to identify some type of resolution to this issue and perhaps another that we have been discussing with the IFW, DEP and the

Governor's office related to habitat mitigation associated with significant statewide energy projects. If the committee would agree, I would like to turn this concept draft into a resolve, directing the department to create an interested party's stakeholder group to examine the current timber harvest policies on BPL public land in northern, eastern and western Maine and to further discuss possible changes to the current wetland mitigation program at DEP to determine whether that policy should extend to wildlife habitat mitigation as well. I can speak further to the mitigation issue if the committee so desires. Commissioner Camuso can as well. Thank you and I hope the committee will support our proposal.