

**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. 321

**“AN ACT TO ENSURE THE CONTINUATION OF THE
LANDOWNER RELATIONS PROGRAM”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative Keschl of Belgrade

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator Breen of Cumberland
Representative Bradstreet of Vassalboro
Representative Campbell of Orrington
Representative Corey of Windham
Representative Marean of Hollis
Representative Nadeau of Winslow
Representative Reed of Carmel
Representative Black of Franklin

DATE OF HEARING: February 11, 2019

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Colonel Joel Wilkinson, Chief of the Maine Warden Service at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, neither for nor against **L.D. 321**.

We would first like to thank the bill sponsor Representative Keschl of Belgrade for introducing this bill to ensure the continuation of the Landowner Relations Program (LOR). I want to preface my comments by stating that we are taking a position of NFNA due to the commitment of Governor Mills to place this funding in the current Governor’s Budget proposal. Her commitment to place this in her budget shows her strong belief in the program and the necessity to support our landowners. The Department is deeply appreciative of her support. I would like to take this opportunity to speak about the current program and our mandated obligations in state law.

Currently, in state law the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is required to develop and implement a landowner relations program.

- (1) The program must encourage landowners to allow outdoor recreationists access to their property to hunt, fish or engage in other outdoor recreational pursuits;
- (2) Foster good relationships between landowners and outdoor recreationalists; and

- (3) Promote high standards of courtesy, respect and responsibility by outdoor recreationists in their relations with landowners.

State law requires that the Commissioner appoint a landowner relations coordinator to oversee the program and any other landowner relations activities of the Department. Due to the connectivity between users and landowners and the conflict resolution necessary to resolve these issues, we assigned an additional Game Warden position and brought him out of routine patrol to focus on this program. This structures the program with two dedicated Game Warden positions working on LOR initiatives and issues. Corporal LaFlamme and Corporal Chabot who are assigned to this program, have the full support of the Commissioner and my office to carry out the elements of this program currently in law which I have summarized.

- (1) Build an educated and motivated group of outdoor recreationists who meet and promote high standards of courtesy, respect and responsibility in their relations with landowners;
- (2) Develop a certificate for persons wishing to support or participate in the landowner program; (current "Outdoor Partners Program")
- (3) Develop a code of ethics promoting high standards of courtesy, respect and responsibility in their relations with landowners;
- (4) Develop an outreach program that provides educational materials and signs informing landowners and land users about rights, liabilities, and traditions;
- (5) Engage organizations and companies representing landowners, conservation groups, recreationists, land trusts and other organizations involved in outdoor recreation in developing, implementing and publicizing the program;
- (6) Organize and promote landowner appreciation events;
- (7) Work with various state agencies to promote and broaden public access to private lands for recreational use; and
- (8) Develop sources of funding to support the program.

In 2015, the Legislature adopted the Keep Maine Clean Program which added language to Title 12 directing the Department to recruit volunteers to pick up trash in fields and forests while engaging in outdoor recreation and to promote the program through a publicly accessible website, e-mail and a monthly e-mail newsletter to volunteers.

I am proud to say that due to the collective work of our staff under the direction of Corporal LaFlamme and Chabot in coordinating "landowner clean-up days," and the support of generous business owners like Kittery Trading Post, Waste Management, BDS Tire Disposal as well as other various outdoor recreational groups, we have cleaned up over one million pounds of illegally dumped trash on private landowner's property! The leading cause of landowners restricting public access to their private property is illegal dumping.

In closing, without our landowners, no person, regardless of their passion will have a place to enjoy the very outdoor activities we are all so passionate about. These experiences are key to our quality of place and quality of life. Continued support of our landowners is essential and continued support of the Department's Landowner Relations Program is key to the success of those relationships.

I would be glad to answer any questions now and will make our Landowner Relations Specialists available to this committee during the work session.