

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

In Opposition To L.D. 1117

“An Act To Encourage Turkey Hunting”

SPONSORED BY: Senator BELLOWS of Kennebec.

Cosponsored by: Representative HICKMAN of Winthrop and
Senators: DAVIS of Piscataquis, MIRAMANT of Knox, Representatives: ACKLEY of
Monmouth, HARNETT of Gardiner, MAXMIN of Nobleboro, WARREN of Hallowell

DATE OF HEARING: March 25, 2019

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Director of the Bureau of Resource Management, representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking in opposition to **L.D. 1117**.

This bill eliminates the turkey hunting permit and fee and the requirement to tag wild turkeys at registration stations. It directs hunters to report the number of wild turkeys they harvest at the conclusion of each turkey hunting season. Finally, it directs the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to increase the spring wild turkey bag limit to 4 males, and the fall bag limit to 8 turkeys of either sex.

The Department is supportive of efforts that would increase participation in turkey hunting as well as the harvest of wild turkeys. However, as written, this bill presents several challenges for the Department's ability to effectively manage the state's turkey population. The ability to track hunter effort using turkey permits, and to precisely track turkey harvest through tagging, are critical parts of the Department's overall turkey management program. In fact, we are now in the 2nd year of an intensive research project with the University of Maine to develop a new method to track turkey population size and harvest rate. This work is predicated on the requirement for hunters to tag turkeys at registration stations. We are also concerned that this bill would establish statewide bag limits for turkeys, without regard for turkey population size or productivity in various parts of the state.

The Department has recently completed a big game planning process that included wild turkeys. This planning effort included extensive public consultation, a review of the status of wild turkeys in Maine, and incorporated the latest scientific information on turkey management. The plan identifies several needs and priorities for wild turkey management, which the Department is aggressively pursuing. Over the past 2 years, we have implemented web-based registration, initiated the largest turkey research project ever conducted in our state, and were given the

authority by the Legislature to set season dates and bag limits in rule. We are currently in the early stages of a rulemaking process that would increase the fall turkey bag limit to 5 birds in certain WMDs, open the fall hunting season in mid-September instead of October 1st, establish a fall youth day, and expand the types of shotguns and loads that are legal for turkey hunting. This draft rule proposal was presented to the Department's Advisory Council last Thursday. The Department would like to ensure that we maintain a healthy turkey population in Maine while addressing nuisance issues and expanding opportunity. We are committed to fully implementing the turkey management plan and request that the Committee give us the time and authority to do so.

We would reiterate our appreciation for the bill sponsors in looking to increase opportunity for turkey hunting. The Department is confident that we can work with the interested parties to establish a sound framework for an expanded fall turkey season that will meet the interest in a youth day as well as provide increased turkey hunting opportunities for all.

I would be happy to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.