

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

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

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 175

LD TITLE: An Act To Extend the Deer Hunting Season by 2 Saturdays

SPONSORED BY: Representative McCREA of Fort Fairfield.

Cosponsored by Senator CARPENTER of Aroostook and Representatives: BROOKS of Lewiston, BRYANT of Windham, COLLINGS of Portland, COREY of Windham, HARRINGTON of Sanford, MARTIN of Sinclair, ORDWAY of Standish, STANLEY of Medway

DATE OF HEARING: February 4, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Research and Assessment Supervisor for the Wildlife Division, representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife in opposition to **L.D. 175**.

This bill amends Title 12 to extend the statewide Regular Firearms Season for deer by adding two additional Saturdays in the two weeks following Thanksgiving.

This bill will increase the number of days allowed for hunting deer in the regular firearms season. The season extension would overlap with the existing special muzzleloader season, which could increase conflicts with these hunters. The bill also increases the season uniformly across the State, without regard to the deer population or hunting conditions. The Department is concerned that adding two additional Saturdays, which typically see significantly higher hunter effort and harvest than weekdays, could result in a substantial increase in the buck harvest. These additional days would also occur during a time when good snow tracking conditions are more likely, leading to higher hunter success. In some Wildlife Management Districts (WMDs), this has the potential to reduce buck:doe ratios and the proportion of mature bucks to a level where hunter satisfaction starts to decline. For example, we estimate that during the fall 2018 hunting season, adding 2 Saturdays would have resulted in the additional harvest of about 7,500 deer, the majority of which would have been bucks. Ultimately, a significant increase in the buck harvest could necessitate placing limits on hunter participation or reducing season length in some WMDs to maintain a healthy deer population.

As the Department implements the recently completed Big Game Management Plan, we are investigating ways to increase the harvest of antlerless deer in those areas of the State where the population exceeds social and biological objectives. However, the Department hopes to do this in a way that is predictable for all hunters, preferably without establishing preferences for certain user groups. Ultimately, any change to deer hunting regulations should strive to achieve a predictable harvest that allows the Department to manage deer in a biologically responsible

manner. We would ask the Committee to allow the Department the time to continue implementing the Big Game Management Plan to accomplish that.

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