

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

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

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 190

LD TITLE: “An Act To Provide Antlerless Deer Permits To Senior Resident Lifetime Hunting License Holders”

SPONSORED BY: Representative HUTCHINS of Penobscot.

Cosponsored by Representatives: CAMPBELL of Orrington, McDONALD of Stonington, O’CONNOR of Berwick, STANLEY of Medway, Senators: CYRWAY of Kennebec, Davis of Piscataquis

DATE OF HEARING: February 4, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Resource Management Director speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 190**.

This bill provides that a person 65 years of age or older who possesses a valid senior resident lifetime hunting license must receive a permit to lawfully take an antlerless deer in any part of the State open to the taking of antlerless deer.

The size of Maine’s deer population is regulated, in part, by the number of female deer killed by the various forms of hunting. The Department attempts to control the number of female deer killed in each Wildlife Management District (WMD) within a range that will allow the Department to meet its deer population management objectives throughout the State. This means that each year only a specific number of female deer can be killed by all means of deer hunting. If this number is exceeded, the deer population will decline.

The bill does limit the take of antlerless deer by senior lifetime license holders to those WMDs where antlerless deer permits are issued. However, it does not allow the Department to control the level of the antlerless deer harvest by senior life time license holders since there are no limits on the number of individuals that would be eligible for this opportunity. Currently, there are approximately 36,000 senior lifetime license holders that would be automatically eligible for an any-deer permit if this bill were to pass. To address this issue, the Department will have to reduce the number of any-deer permits available to other hunters to account for the anticipated harvest by seniors. In most years, more than 50% of permits would likely go to senior lifetime license holders, making them unavailable for youth hunters, landowners, and the general hunting population. In some years, there would be zero permits available to other hunters, and the number issued to senior lifetime license holders would exceed the total number of permits that would normally be issued during the drawing. These

permits would be valid in any WMD open to the hunting of antlerless deer, which would result in an extremely unpredictable antlerless deer harvest and remove the Department's ability to carefully regulate the harvest of female deer in each WMD.

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.