

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

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

In Support of L.D. 1118

**“An Act To Give the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Rule-making
Authority To Establish a Bear Season Framework and Bag Limits”**

PRESENTED by: Senator DAVIS of Piscataquis.

Cosponsored by: Representative NADEAU of Winslow and
Senators: BLACK of Franklin, CYRWAY of Kennebec, DILL of Penobscot, GUERIN of
Penobscot, POULIOT of Kennebec, Representatives: HIGGINS of Dover-Foxcroft, STEARNS
of Guilford.

DATE OF HEARING: March 25, 2019

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, the Research and Assessment Section Supervisor for the Wildlife Division, representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking in support of **L.D. 1118**.

This bill allows the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to establish fall bear hunting and trapping season dates and bag limits by rule. It reduces the cost of a resident bear hunting permit and a resident bear trapping permit from \$27 to \$10, and it repeals the 2-bear limit in statute and instead refers to the bag limit to be set in rule. The bill would also authorize the purchase of a bear trapping permit with either a trapping license or a big game hunting license, and requires bear trappers to complete a bear trapping education course unless they have held a bear trapping permit prior to 2020.

The Department has recently completed a big game planning process that included black bears. This planning effort included extensive public consultation, a review of the status of bears in Maine, and incorporated the latest scientific information on bear management. The plan identifies several needs and priorities for bear management, which the Department is aggressively pursuing. As a result of this planning effort we have implemented web-based registration, are contracting with Cornell University to develop a new population model for bears, initiated a project to improve tracking of bear conflicts, continue to survey bear hunters, and are continuing our long-running efforts to monitor the health of the bear population by studying radio-collared bears. However, we currently lack the ability to achieve one of our most important objectives for bears in Maine: minimizing bear population growth in areas of higher human density.

We are extremely fortunate to have one of the largest bear populations in the country, yet we have relatively few human-bear conflicts and most that do occur are not severe. However,

Maine's bear population has been growing steadily at 2-4% per year since 2005. As the bear population increases, it is also expanding further into central and southern Maine, where the potential for conflicts with humans is highest.

By giving the Commissioner the ability to establish fall season dates and bag limits in rule, and by reducing the bear hunting and trapping permit fees for residents, this bill provides the Department more flexibility to adjust harvest in a manner that will allow effective management of the bear population on a regional basis. The Big Game Species Plan discussion around bear suggested the Department decrease the permit fee to increase participation by hunters, with the thought that sales would be enough to compensate for any decrease in revenue to the Department.

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