

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

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

**In Opposition To L.D. 638**

**“An Act To Legalize the Use of Supplemental Minerals To Assist with Wildlife Nutrition.”**

**SPONSORED BY Senator DAVIS of Piscataquis.**

**DATE OF HEARING: February 25, 2019**

Good afternoon 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 opposition to **L.D. 638**.

This bill would amend Title 12 to allow, with landowner permission, the placement of supplemental minerals for deer from March 1<sup>st</sup> through July 31<sup>st</sup>. The supplemental minerals must not contain any grain or food products. Currently, bait, food, or salt can only be placed for deer from December 16<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Department appreciates the intent of this bill in that it would allow placement of supplemental minerals to enhance nutrition of deer. Deer are at the northern edge of their range in Maine, and can struggle to survive our severe winters. Providing mineral supplements may help improve deer condition and growth, particularly in areas with minerally deficient soils. However, we are concerned that the potential negative consequences of allowing expanded use of mineral licks outweigh the positive impacts that this bill may provide.

In addition to influencing deer movements and behavior, placing mineral supplements for deer is known to create conditions that increase the risk of disease transmission. In particular, recent research has confirmed that mineral licks can be a reservoir for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and may facilitate the spread of the disease among wild deer. CWD is widely viewed as one of the most significant challenges in the history of modern wildlife conservation. If established in Maine, CWD may have devastating impacts on the state’s deer and moose herds, our hunting heritage, and Maine’s economy. Given these risks, we do not believe it is prudent to expand the use of supplemental feed or minerals for deer.

Our agency is currently collaborating with the Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry and the USDA to develop and implement a comprehensive CWD Prevention and Response Plan for our state. This plan will include recommendations on ways to promote deer survival in Maine while minimizing the risk of CWD transmission. These recommendations may include changes to the laws governing feeding or providing mineral supplements for deer. We encourage the Committee to give us the time to complete this plan prior to enacting any changes

to deer feeding in the state.

We would also like to make sure the Committee is aware this section of statute currently refers to 'salt or any other bait or food', but does not use the term 'supplemental minerals'. We suggest that using consistent language throughout this section will help reduce the complexity of our laws. Finally, current statute does already allow the placement of supplemental minerals from December 15<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup>, so we believe the exemption provided by this bill, if it were to proceed, need only apply for the period from June 1<sup>st</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup>.

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