# Report on the Resolve to Establish a Task Force to Examine the Decline in the Number of NonResident Hunters Chapter 51, LD 792, 125th Maine State Legislature

## Executive Summary

In Maine, the numbers of Nonresident hunting license buyers have dropped from a high in the last decade in 2002 of 41,538; to 37,925 in 2005, down to an all-time low of 27,898 in 2010. This decline in Nonresident hunter numbers has created a considerable economic impact, particularly in the rural regions of our state; and is more significant than the national trend would suggest.

In a series of 3 meetings and countless emails, this Task Force has arrived at many recommendations that require collaborative marketing strategies with the Maine Office of Tourism, consideration and action required by MDIFW, and consideration and action required by the Legislature.

Throughout the country, hunter numbers are declining as a long term trend on a national level. This raises serious concern about the future of conservation - how will fish and wildlife conservation be funded if hunting revenues continue to decline?

Overall, the top 5 recommendations generated by the Task Force might be summarized as follows:

- MDIFW must work collaboratively with the Office of Tourism to develop a marketing plan promoting Maine as a destination for Nonresident hunters; and in all areas of outdoor recreation.

- Funding should be allocated to survey current and recently lapsed Nonresident hunters, using a qualified market research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues; to find out what these customers want, why they have lapsed, and what barriers there are for travel to Maine as a hunting destination.

- Based on the data generated from this market research, marketing tools, strategies and training must be provided to Maine's hunting industry partners, including guides, outfitters, sporting camps, B & Bs, and other state agencies such as Office of Tourism and Department of Conservation; to multiply the effect of the marketing plan.

- New hunting licenses, 'repackaged' licenses, or licenses that feature new privileges or opportunities appear to be one of the greatest factors with the potential to positively affect any kind of license sales. The Legislature and MDIFW must take a closer look at ways to accomplish and implement this initiative in a timely manner.

- Maine must do more to promote its lands open to hunting statewide, and the ease of access to them. Paper collateral such as maps and brochures, and online information that can be shared by state agency and hunting partners' websites, must be developed, distributed and kept current.

Many more specific recommendations are included in the following pages.
The minutes of each of the three meetings are available online on the homepage @ www.mefishwildlife.com; as are the electronic links to current data and research used in the preparation of this report.
The members of this Task Force collectively hope that you, as Legislators, will give due consideration to, and initiate action on, these important recommendations.

# Report on the Resolve to Establish a Task Force to Examine the Decline in the Number of Nonresident Hunters

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## Background:

A Task Force was convened by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) to examine the decline in numbers of Nonresident hunters. Three meetings and a volume of email contributed to the following conclusions.

## The Task Force did the following:

1. Reviewed the numbers of Nonresident hunters over the last 5 years
2. Reviewed national trends regarding Nonresident hunters over the last 5 years
3. Considered marketing possibilities to increase Nonresident hunter numbers
4. Considered changes to existing laws and rules that may increase Nonresident hunter numbers
3. Developed recommendations to increase numbers of future Nonresident hunters

## The Problem:

The Task Force recognizes that overall, hunter numbers are declining as a long term trend on a national level. This raises serious concern about the future of conservation - how will fish and wildlife conservation be funded if hunting revenues continue to decline?

Maine's decline in Nonresident hunter numbers has created a considerable economic impact, particularly in the rural regions of our state; and is more significant than the national trend would suggest. Maine must work on encouraging an increase in numbers of available Nonresident hunters to add this state as their hunting destination. Many states within our drive market have significant numbers of hunters (for instance PA has one million) that could be encouraged to see Maine as a destination hunting experience.

## Discoveries:

1. Numbers of Maine Nonresident hunters have dropped from a high in 2002 of 41,538; to 37,925 in 2005, to an all-time low of 27,898 in 2010.
2. Numbers of Alien hunters have dropped from a high in 1995 of 1885 to 232 in 2010.
3. After reaching a peak in 1982, sales of hunting licenses across the US have steadily declined on the national level, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 2006 National Survey of Hunting and Fishing. (the next USFWS Survey will become available Spring, 2012)

## Task Force Recommendations are divided into the following categories:

a. Develop Collaborative Marketing Strategies with Maine Office of Tourism to target the Nonresident hunter audience
b. Department Actions recommended
c. Legislative Actions recommended

## Task Force Recommendations:

Collaborative Marketing Recommended:

- An annual marketing plan should be developed, with assistance from Maine Office of Tourism, to increase the numbers of Nonresident hunters; this plan should be updated each January to review progress and ensure agency implementation. Any marketing plan should include measurable goals that can be readily gauged.
- The Nonresident hunting audience must first be surveyed to find out what these potential and lapsed customers want; based on marketing research that to date has not been utilized. An independent research report will identify market potential, market areas, potential products, market demands and the like. In an overall declining market, research is THE KEY to carefully and scientifically determine if and how strategic investments can be made to increase targeted participation.
- Marketing tools and training for Maine's hunting industry partners must be provided; such as guides, outfitters, sporting camps, B&Bs, and other state agencies
- All state promotions should include information about Maine's world class resources, ease of access, available and open lands, and outdoor experiences
- Targeted marketing and communications towards older hunters must be developed and implemented
- Maine's Tourism regions should be encouraged to participate in marketing hunting
- Targeted marketing should be implemented towards youth and family hunting participation
- The creation and promotion of family hunting packages should be explored
- Species other than moose, deer and bear must be promoted; emphasizing turkey, waterfowl, upland birds, rabbits and coyotes. Marketing efforts of MDIFW, MOT and Department of Conservation should be complimentary and collaborative to every extent possible.

## Legislative Actions Recommended:

- Law change to allow Nonresidents to hunt on opening day of the firearms deer season. Eliminate the "residents only" opening day of deer season to demonstrate a more welcoming attitude toward Nonresident hunters.
- Remove Wild Turkeys from the Big Game license category and categorize them as Small Game.
- Create and sell 3-day Wild Turkey licenses.
- Eliminate the word 'Alien' throughout Title 12 and replace with Nonresident. A separate classification for Nonresidents from another country is not in place for anglers - only for hunters.
- Eliminate the law that requires any 'Alien' hunter must hire a Guide to hunt.
- The Nonresident youth fishing license should be eliminated: it should be on par with resident youth fishing; no license required for 15 and under. (this was not really the purview of this task force but came up in our analysis).

## MDIFW Actions Recommended:

- The Nonresident hunting audience, both current and lapsed, must be surveyed as a part of an independent research report to find out what our customers want; basing marketing efforts, new license packages and new license opportunities on scientific research
- "Ease of access" has been identified as a primary issue in much of current research. Maps and internet sites showing public lands statewide that are open to hunting should be developed, promoted, and kept current.
- The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife modernize the "MOSES" online licensing system.
- Paper and online Moose Permit Applications should be made available year 'round
- The Moose Lottery drawing should be moved to January
- The Moose Lottery must be made fairer to Nonresidents: 26% of total moose applications are from Nonresidents, however just 10% of the permits are allocated to Nonresidents. At least 25% of Moose Permits should be allocated to Nonresidents.
- A designated number of Moose Permits should be offered and sold to Registered Maine Guides to provide moose hunt packages to their customers
- Hunting should be promoted for species other than moose, deer and bear; turkey, waterfowl, upland birds, rabbits and coyotes offer significant opportunities.
- Positive change and messaging on deer herd improvements must be implemented and kept current
- Positions for a designated Deer Biologist and Moose Biologist must be created and funded
- The current Apprentice Hunter/Mentor program must be more heavily promoted
- The creation of a family hunting license should be explored

- Sunday hunting was much discussed by task force members; the group was evenly divided on whether to recommend a revisit to this contentious issue.
- Weekly regional wildlife biologist's reports during hunting seasons to provide current information about statewide hunting opportunities should be reinstated.
- Email addresses should be requested on all license applications, both paper and/or online; so they can be used in regular information email blasts from MDIFW or Maine Office of Tourism
- All license agents statewide must be required to sell both Resident and Nonresident licenses at all times and in all categories

## Summary:

We recognize that hunter numbers are declining as a long term trend on a national level. This trend raises serious concern about conservation funding in the future. The decline in Nonresident hunter numbers has had a significant economic impact in the rural regions of our state. Maine's decline in Nonresident hunter numbers is more significant than the national trend would suggest. There are significant hunter numbers in the drive to market that may be encouraged to add Maine as a hunting destination. We recommend that the legislature implement our recommendations to have every out of state hunter add Maine to their "bucket list" of destinations to hunt.

A coordinated marketing effort will yield significant results over time. Nonresident hunter numbers have responded to the significant lack of marketing effort over time, exacerbated by a drop in the whitetail deer population and a sluggish economy. According to Responsive Management, an internationally recognized public opinion and attitude survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, changes involving licenses appear to be one of the greatest factors with potential to affect license sales.

# Appendix A
## Members of the Task Force

Legislation required the following Task Force membership:

1. Three guides and 3 outfitters selected by an organization identified by the department that represents professional guides

3 Guides

| | |
|---|---|
| Steve Wilcox | Maine Guide |
| Jeff Bellmore | Maine Professional Guides Association |
| Don Kleiner | Executive Director, Maine Professional Guides Association |
| Tenley Bennett | Maine Guide, Sporting Camp Owner, Regional Tourism Representative |

3 Outfitters

| | |
|---|---|
| Wayne Plummer | Maine Guide and Tourism Region Representative |
| Steve Wilcox | |
| Jim Yearwood | |

2. One representative of the Maine Tourism Commission selected by the Department of Economic and Community Development

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|---|---|
| Sarah Medina | Maine Tourism Commission Representative |

3. One person from each tourism region selected by the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Tourism

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|---|---|
| Wayne Plummer | |
| Jim Yearwood | |
| Tenley Bennett | |
| Mac McKeever | LL Bean and Tourism Region Representative |
| Denise Murchison | Maine Professional Guide and Tourism Region Representative |
| Alvion Kimball | Bed & Breakfast owner and Tourism Region Representative |

4. One marketing director from the Department, selected by the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

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|---|---|
| Edie Smith | Former Director, Division of Information and Education, DIF&W |

Other MDFIW representatives:

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|---|---|
| Mike Favreau | District Game Warden, Greenville |
| Ralph Brissette | Information Center |
| Lisa Kane | I&E |
| Mark Ostermann | Supervisor, Data Processing Group |

5. The Director of the Office of Tourism within the Department of Economic and Community Development

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|---|---|
| Carolann Ouellette | Director, Maine Office of Tourism |
| Denise Murchison | |
| Elaine Vandenaise | |

6. One nonresident sportsman selected by a statewide sportsmen's organization; and be it further

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|---|---|
| David Maynard | Nonresident landowner and hunter; member of SAM, Brockton, MA |

Others participating:

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| Aron Semle | Youth Fish and Wildlife writer |
| Garrett Sughrue | Youth Fish and Wildlife writer |
| Carolyn Manson | Maine Tourism Association |

Appendix B

Nonresident Hunter Task Force Data, References and Minutes available online at:

www.mefishwildlife.com

Public Law 51
Agenda Oct 2 Meeting
George Smith Downeast Column
Supersport Statistics
2010 License Sales Summary
Any Deer Results First Choice Winners WMD
Any Deer Lottery Data
2006 Stats
Increasing Hunting Participation
Issues Related To Hunting Access
National Hunting License Report
Outreach and Marketing
Factors Related To Hunting and Fishing Participation
Licenses sold by State of residence in 2003
Licenses sold by State of residence in 2010
Written comments received from hunters as of Oct 23, 2011
Minutes of the October 2nd meeting
Agenda Oct 23 Meeting
Agenda Nov 20 Meeting
Written comments received from hunters as of Nov 16, 2011
Minutes of the October 23rd meeting
Minutes of the November 20th meeting
Final Report (PDF)

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125th Maine State Legislature

The Honorable Paul R. LePage, Governor

Chandler Woodcock, Commissioner

January 2012