

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

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

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 531

**“AN ACT TO ADD GRAY SQUIRRELS TO THE SPECIES LIST FOR THE OPEN TRAINING
SEASON FOR HUNTING DOGS”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative Bradstreet of Vassalboro

DATE OF HEARING: April 24, 2023

Good afternoon Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of **L.D. 531**.

This bill adds gray squirrels to the list of those animals upon which a person may train dogs during the open training season for dogs. This provision would be in addition to the species that this activity is already provided for during that timeframe, including foxes, raccoons, and snowshoe hare. There are separate statutory requirements for training bears with dogs.

Similar to snowshoe hare, gray squirrel are considered upland game and can be hunted during the open season (last Saturday of September through December 31 (traditional) or until February 28th (falconry)). Squirrel hunting is a popular activity and can be a great way to recruit new hunters because it is low impact, can be done almost anywhere, and requires relatively little equipment. Using trained dogs to hunt squirrels is a well-established form of small game hunting in the southern United States and is gaining popularity elsewhere, including the northeast. Allowing the use of dogs to hunt squirrels has many benefits, including providing a unique hunting experience that is family-friendly, often with plenty of action and high success rates.

Gray squirrels are abundant in Maine and the Department doesn't believe that this additional opportunity to train dogs will have any negative implications for squirrel populations or other wildlife. Additionally, the Department believes that adding the ability for a person to train their dogs to hunt squirrels is not likely to cause any major issues for landowners or other hunters. Squirrel hunters typically hunt with a small

number of dogs at a time (1-2 dogs) and dogs are trained to hunt close to the owner, trail silently and only bark when they have a squirrel treed.

If the committee is in favor of moving this proposal forward, we would suggest that you also add red squirrels to the bill, as this would simplify enforcement and provide additional opportunities for training dogs on an abundant squirrel species.

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