

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

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

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 613

“An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Antlerless Deer Permit Process”

SPONSORED BY: Representative FOSTER of Dexter

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator BLACK of Franklin, Representative CARMICHAEL of Greenbush, Representative HAGGAN of Hampden, Representative JAVNER of Chester, Representative SCHMERSAL-BURGESS of Mexico, Representative THORNE of Carmel, Representative WHITE of Guilford, Representative WOODSOME of Waterboro

DATE OF HEARING: March 13, 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 opposition to **L.D. 613**.

This bill provides that the fee for an antlerless deer permit must be paid at the time of registration of the antlerless deer.

The Department charges fees for permits to hunt wildlife for several reasons. All permit fees must be paid up front, authorizing the permit holder to participate in the corresponding activity but not guaranteeing success. This generates funding for conservation and in many cases is used to match federal grant funds (typically at a 3:1 ratio). In 2022, we introduced a suite of changes to the way we regulate the harvest of antlerless deer. These changes were designed to improve our ability to meet doe harvest objectives by making the harvest of antlerless deer a more attractive option and by trying to get permits into the hands of hunters that are more likely to use them. One change made during this process was to charge a \$12 fee for antlerless deer permits. This change placed an appropriate value on the opportunity to take an additional deer, generated revenue for deer wintering area acquisition and management, and increased the likelihood that hunters applying for permits would be motivated to use their

permits. Getting permits into the hands of hunters that are likely to use them is critical to achieving Department harvest objectives.

This bill would result in a fiscal impact of ~\$800,000 annually to the deer management fund, plus a corresponding ~\$2,400,000 reduction in federal grant funds. The deer management fund is specifically earmarked for the acquisition and management of deer habitat. In addition to significant fiscal impacts, this bill may also lead to future efforts to require payment of fees for other permit types only upon successful harvest of an animal.

Two of the core tenets of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation are the elimination of markets for game and the treatment of wildlife as a public trust resource. Requiring hunters to pay a permit fee after successfully harvesting an animal very closely resembles a hunter paying for the animal rather than for the opportunity to hunt that animal. Furthermore, if the hunter is paying for the animal, that payment is to the State, which is not positioned to sell this public trust resource. While the North American Model should not be considered infallible, it has provided a guiding light for wildlife managers for many years, and this bill violates the Model's core tenets.

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