

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

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

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 163

**“An Act to Increase Communication Between the Department of Inland Fisheries and
Wildlife and Lifetime License Holders by Requiring Free License Renewals Under Certain
Circumstances”**

PRESENTED BY: Representative HEPLER of Woolwich.

DATE OF HEARING: February 6, 2023

Good afternoon Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nathan Webb, Wildlife Director for IFW, speaking on behalf of the Department in support of **L.D. 163**.

This bill requires holders of a lifetime license to hunt, trap, or fish to notify the Department each year the person intends to use the license by completing a renewal process with the department, at no charge. This is a department bill that would address multiple challenges we are experiencing with administering these licenses, including not having current contact information for lifetime license holders and having a poor understanding of participation rates.

Lifetime licenses to hunt, trap, or fish have become an extremely popular option in Maine since they were first established in 2000. MDIFW has issued a total of over 100,000 lifetime licenses, and we now sell more than 7,000 lifetime licenses each year. Once purchased, these licenses authorize the holder to participate in the corresponding activity within the state of Maine for the remainder of their life, regardless of residency. Revenue from these licenses is deposited into the Lifetime License Fund (12 M.R.S. §10251), from which the Department can spend no more than 5% annually.

State fish and wildlife agencies require licenses to hunt, trap, and fish for three primary reasons: 1) to generate funding for conservation and management programs; 2) to allow efficient communication with participants in these activities; and 3) to manage participation and gauge success rates. Although they provide an important and predictable source of revenue for the Department, the popularity of lifetime licenses has led to a slow erosion of our ability to communicate with these license holders and to understand participation rates. Although contact information is recorded when lifetime licenses are first sold, the quality of this information degrades over time as license holders age, change addresses, or move out of state. This makes it impossible for us to send information to these users or solicit their input on proposed management programs. As a recent example, when the Department issued a ‘Do Not Eat Advisory’ for deer in the Fairfield area in November 2021, we sent this information directly to all

licensed hunters that lived near the advisory area. We have no way of knowing how many active hunters with lifetime licenses that live within or near the advisory area were missed in this communication effort. The Department also produces a great deal of educational content for our users that we are currently unable to send to many lifetime license holders because the contact information associated with their license is out of date.

Perhaps even more important than ensuring the Department can contact license holders is improving our ability to determine participation rates. Although we suspect that many lifetime license holders are 'inactive' in any particular year, we have no way of formally evaluating this. Therefore, it is currently impossible for us to determine the number of hunters, trappers, and anglers that are active participants. In addition to being critical information to evaluate our recruitment efforts, knowing the number of active users is required to calculate success rates, which is an important metric used to evaluate the management programs for some game species. For example, we currently have no way of accurately estimating deer hunter success rates because we do not know how many lifetime license holders actually hunt each year (and for a significant percentage, we lack current contact information in order to ask them!). This negatively impacts our ability to estimate effort and inform management decisions, including determining population trends of some wildlife. Gaining this information will also assist the Department in surveying hunters to estimate compliance with self-reporting of game registration, which begins for turkey in the spring of 2023.

As a final example of the challenges associated with our lack of current information on lifetime license holders, in many cases we have unknowingly continued to send information to license holders that have passed away, sometimes for several years after their death. This has led to many difficult conversations between Department staff and the family members of these license holders that must contact us to stop the unwanted communications.

To address these issues, we propose that all holders of lifetime licenses renew their license each year they intend to use it, at no cost. This would provide us with critical information on the number of these license holders that are active in a particular year. This change would also make it easier for us to make these license holders aware of Department programs, such as contacting anglers to inform them of measures to prevent invasive species, promote the clean, drain, dry campaign, and provide all our user groups with information on laws, rules, and other updates.

These issues were not discussed or anticipated when lifetime licenses were established over 20 years ago. Additionally, at the time we didn't envision that the need and opportunity for digital communications with our customers would be so prevalent as it is today. This is especially true because there is a such a large volume of lifetime licenses, and they are making up an increasing percentage of our total license sales.

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