

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

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

In Opposition to L.D. 386

An Act To Establish a Comprehensive Wildlife Biology Internship Program

SPONSORED BY: Representative SAMPSON of Alfred.

Cosponsored by Representatives: McCREA of Fort Fairfield, STEARNS of Guilford.

DATE OF HEARING: February 20, 2019.

Good afternoon Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Resource Management Director representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 386**.

This bill proposes to create a paid internship program in the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife in order to provide beginning wildlife biologists with a diversity of opportunities to increase their experience and make them more versatile and more likely to pursue careers in the state. Specifically, this bill requires the Department to offer a minimum of three paid internships of no less than two years each. The bill as presented, would create three additional permanent positions in state government subject to current collective bargaining agreements and accompanying full benefit packages. Furthermore, this bill requires the Department to create a curriculum for these permanent positions that offers experience in various fields of study.

As a professional wildlife biologist, I am sensitive to the issue raised in this bill as my career began with a terrific education and work experiences at the University of Maine. Based on that education and accompanying experience, I started a wonderful career that continues to this day, working for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. All wildlife biologists start this same way, with a ride along, visit or talk with a professional wildlife biologist when they are in high school or even younger. All Department staff help students in these early stages of looking for a career in a natural resource field by visiting schools, giving talks at meetings, staffing sportsmen shows and sharing their time with the public at large. The journey for interested individuals then progresses to a course of study at a college and then an accumulation of part time, short term and long term experience until the individuals dream job is attained. This bill, while appearing to be supportive of that concept, diverts the Department to establish an internship program that already exists at colleges within the state. Beyond that the bill requires the Department to eliminate existing opportunities to fund these newly established permanent state positions.

Currently, the Department has a number of mechanisms available that are used to meet the needs of the Department for seasonal and short term staffing for management, survey and research projects. The Maine Government Summer Internship Program run through the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center has been utilized in the past. The Department has work study agreements with the University of Maine at Fort Kent and Unity College to employ college students. The Department has used temporary staffing services with approved vendors and professional services contracts to staff moose check stations, collect deer and fish data, conduct breeding bird and stream surveys, band waterfowl, conduct bear den work and a host of other projects that support the Department's wildlife and fisheries management programs. In addition, many of these experiences are used as internships by students through research agreements with universities and colleges the Department has conducted joint graduate research projects that support graduate education and provide training for under graduates at the same time. Many of these employment opportunities overlap, require specific skills, varying time commitments and subject participants to different working conditions. Some of the work is performed on weekends, some during the week, lasting for days, weeks or months at a time. In some cases, the individuals come with a specific skill the Department doesn't possess, that is needed to perform a specified project within a limited work window. The current system allows the Department to offer multiple opportunities that can accommodate many potential employee's needs. In short, in a responsible manner, honoring Federal and state law, state purchasing regulations, and collective bargaining agreements, the Department is, currently providing the experiences this bill proposes to create.

The funding for the three internships proposed in this bill is intended to be made available by the Department eliminating enough of the current opportunities to support these three new state employees. What has been a successful mix of paid training and experiential opportunities, as well as successful partnerships with state universities and colleges, would be reduced to establish these internships. As I said at the beginning, as a person who had work study jobs, worked for graduate students, and strung together a series of short term experiences that propelled me on to my current career, I appreciate the interest in this topic. However, the Department feels we have a successful approach in place that meets the Department's obligations and goals of this bill.

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