

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

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

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 58

**“RESOLVE, DIRECTING THE COMMISSIONER OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE TO
ESTABLISH SEASONS THAT DO NOT OVERLAP FOR HUNTING BEAR OVER BAIT AND
HUNTING BEAR WITH DOGS.”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative Davis of Machias

DATE OF HEARING: April 24, 2023

Good morning 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. 58**.

This resolve directs the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to establish, prior to the 2024 bear hunting season, seasons that do not overlap for hunting bear over bait and hunting bear with dogs.

The Department has examined this issue many times throughout the last several decades. Currently, bait and dog bear hunting seasons have a two week overlap, with hunting with dogs opening the second week of September and the bait season closing the 3rd week in September. From 1982-1989, hunting bears with bait and dogs was permitted during the entire fall bear hunting season. In 1990, the current season framework was established to address conflicts between bear hunters, reduce the overlap in the two seasons, and to improve equity between the two hunting methods. This framework established the two-week overlap, which now allows a four-week bait hunting season and a seven-week hound hunting season.

In 2016-17, the Department completed a comprehensive planning effort for bears, which included public input through surveys and committee work. A survey of landowners indicated strong support of the Department's regulated bear hunting season and high satisfaction among bear hunters (90%). Additionally, during this process there was considerable discussion among the stakeholder groups about the

importance of providing equitable hunting opportunity, a quality hunting experience, and maintaining strong landowner support. In the end, eliminating the overlap in seasons between bear hunting methods proved to be challenging and was not supported by the bear subcommittee.

The Department continues to monitor hunter satisfaction and explore methods to ensure equity among users. In 2020, the Department surveyed bear hunting permit holders, which included a question about their hunting experience as it related specifically to the two-week overlap in hunting methods. The majority of responding non-resident (68%) and resident (50%) bear permit holders indicated their hunt was rarely or never negatively impacted from this overlap. Fewer non-resident (16%) and resident (28%) responders reported conflicts or had a negative experience due to the season overlap. Although there are certainly some conflicts between bait and dog hunters, we feel the current framework provides a reasonable compromise.

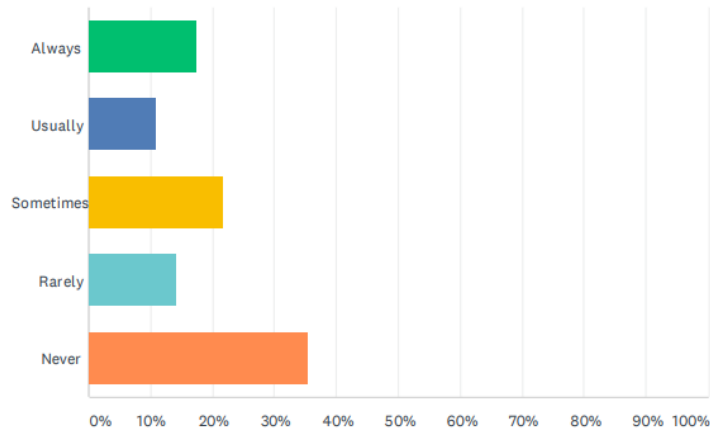
If the Department is directed to eliminate the overlap of these two bear hunting seasons, the only option would be to shorten the season for those hunting with bait, those hunting with dogs, or both. This would undoubtedly reduce hunter satisfaction and would also impact our ability to meet bear harvest objectives.

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

2020 Maine Black Bear Hunting and Trapping Season Survey

Q20 The last two weeks of the bait season overlaps the first two weeks of the hound season. Does this two-week overlap affect your hunting experience negatively?

Answered: 1,178 Skipped: 62

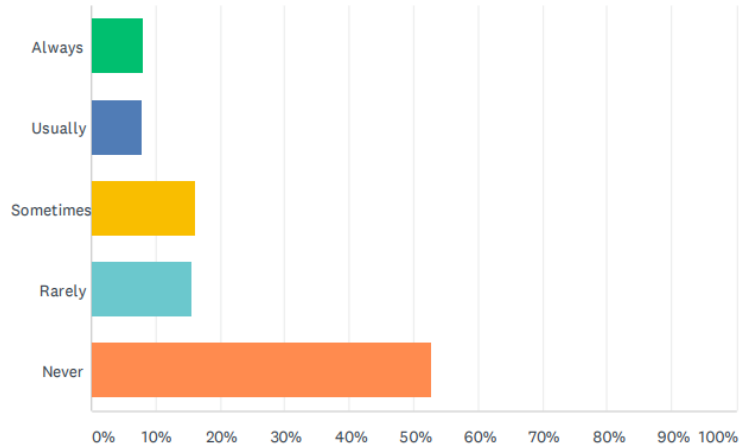


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Always	17.49% 206
Usually	10.95% 129
Sometimes	21.73% 256
Rarely	14.18% 167
Never	35.65% 420
TOTAL	1,178

Figure 1. Twenty-eight percent of residents bear permit holders surveyed in 2020 indicated that their hunt was often negatively affected by the two week overlap of the bait and dog season, with a similar number (22%) reporting sometimes impacted, but most (50%) indicated rarerly or never negatively impacted.

Q20 The last two weeks of the bait season overlaps the first two weeks of the hound season. Does this two-week overlap affect your hunting experience negatively?

Answered: 870 Skipped: 48



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Always	7.93%	69
Usually	7.70%	67
Sometimes	16.21%	141
Rarely	15.52%	135
Never	52.64%	458
TOTAL		870

Figure 2. Sixteen percent of non-residents bear permit holders surveyed in 2020 indicated that their hunt was often negatively affected by the two week overlap of the bait and dog season, with a similar number (22%) reporting sometimes impacted, but most (68%) indicated rarerly or never negatively impacted.

Figure 3. The current bear hunting season framework.

Hunting bears with bait												
					Hunting bears with Dogs				Dear Firearm Season			
Week 4	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
August	September				October				November			