

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

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

**IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 626**

**“An Act to Preserve Maine's Sporting Heritage and Enhance Sporting Opportunities for  
Maine's Youth by Allowing Maine's Youth to Hunt on Sunday”**

Presented by Representative ARDELL of Monticello. Cosponsored by Representatives:  
ALBERT of Madawaska, BABIN of Fort Fairfield, HAGGAN of Hampden.

**DATE OF HEARING: April 10, 2023**

Good morning Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Judy Camuso, Commissioner of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 626**.

This bill allows licensed persons under 18 years of age who hold a valid hunting license or a valid junior hunting license and persons 18 years of age who hold a valid hunting license and are enrolled in secondary school to hunt wild animals and wild birds on private land on Sundays with the landowner's written permission. The bill directs the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to establish rules to implement these provisions.

During the first regular session of the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature (2021) two bills were introduced to the IFW Committee, LDs 1212 and 1033. LD 1212 proposed to allow Sunday hunting in the Northern portion of the state while LD 1033 proposed to allow Sunday hunting on private property with written permission of the landowner. The topic of Sunday hunting has been a heated social debate for years and in fact some type of Sunday hunting bill has been proposed nearly every Legislative session.

The Department testified in opposition to both bills maintaining concern that some landowners may close their property to hunting and other recreational activities if any form of Sunday hunting were made legal. While the agency realizes there could be potential for economic growth and additional opportunity to hunters, at the same time, we recognize that many landowners prefer to have Sunday as a day that they can enjoy their land and allow others an opportunity to recreate.

The Department is sensitive to the concerns of private landowners. Maine is more than 90% privately owned, without the support and generosity of our private landowners, our outdoor recreational opportunities and the ability for the Department to manage wildlife populations would be severely limited. Our staff, particularly our Landowner Relations Program are

committed and focused on the needs of landowners and we are proud of the relationship we have built with many of the landowners in Maine.

Instead of passing the bills as written, the Legislature passed LD 1033 as a Resolve and directed the Department to establish a stakeholder group with broad representation in interest and geographics to examine Sunday hunting in Maine. The group was also asked to develop and complete a survey relating to Sunday hunting, if the department received adequate outside funding to pay for the survey. It then directed the department to report the findings and recommendations of the stakeholder group to this Committee. The committee was authorized to report out a bill related to Sunday hunting during the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislative session.

The stakeholder group was formed, a neutral person was hired to facilitate the 2 in-person meetings and 4 ZOOM meetings that were held from early September through December 2021. Members of the public were able to listen in and provide comment at the end of the meetings. Responsive Management, a private research firm was contracted to develop a survey with the stakeholder group. Group members provided direct feedback on the issues discussed and helped develop the questions for the survey.

The survey was conducted by Responsive Management during late December 2021. The following statistics were notable outcomes of some of the survey questions:

**The key question in the survey, support for or opposition to allowing Sunday hunting in Maine, was asked early in the questionnaire before additional information was provided over the course of the survey.**

- About a third of the general population (34%) support Sunday hunting, while a majority (54%) oppose.
- Over two thirds of hunters (69%) support, compared to 23% who oppose.
- A third of North/East and Central Region landowners (33% each) support Sunday hunting, while 62% and 61%, respectively, oppose. Opposition is very high among South Region landowners, with only 13% who support and most (81%) who oppose.

**Landowners were asked, if Sunday hunting were allowed, if they would be more likely to allow hunting access, more likely to restrict access, or more likely to allow the same level of access. Of particular interest are those who currently allow hunting access but would be more restrictive.**

- Looking at the landowner sample, 44% of those in the sample who do not currently post their land say they would be more likely to restrict access to hunting on their land if Sunday hunting were allowed.

IFW conducted a youth hunting license analysis and the total number of youth hunting licenses have grown to almost 10,000 more than there were 20 years ago. Despite many other sporting opportunities for youth and family weekend activities that may take away from time hunting, the number of youth hunting licenses sold have increased from 20,843 in 2002 to 30,025 in 2022.

Although the department is always looking for ways to recruit more youth hunters, we don't see allowing Sunday hunting as a necessary tool. This means that we are not supportive of allowing Sunday hunting in any scenario at the risk of losing opportunity to recreate on private land for all recreational activities not just hunting. I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.