

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

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

**IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 672**

**“An Act to Establish Youth Deer Hunting Weekend”**

**Presented by Representative MASON of Lisbon.**

Cosponsored by Senator BLACK of Franklin and Representatives: COSTAIN of Plymouth, GUERRETTE of Caribou, HALL of Wilton, JACKSON of Oxford, NUTTING of Oakland, POMERLEAU of Standish, WOOD of Greene, Senator: TIMBERLAKE of Androscoggin

**DATE OF HEARING: March 27, 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. 672**.

This bill allows the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to establish a youth deer hunting weekend instead of one day.

While the focus of this bill would expand opportunity for youth deer hunters it allows hunting on Sunday. We would like to offer background information on recent work and the outcome of a survey on Sunday hunting in Maine for those here that were not a part of the discussion the last few years.

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 cost to conduct the survey was approximately \$72,000 and was paid for by the Department. The Committee asked the Department to raise funding for the cost but when virtually no one came forward to donate towards the survey costs, the department was left to pay for the bill. \$15,000 was provided from the general fund to cover the cost of the stakeholder group and pay for the facilitator.

The following statistics are high level outcomes at the end of the survey as the question of support or opposition to Sunday hunting was asked at the beginning and end of the survey:

- Among the general population, support for Sunday hunting increased from 34% to 38%, and opposition increased a percent (54% to 55%).
- Among hunters, support increased from 69% to 72%, and opposition decreased from 23% to 22%.
- Among landowners in each region: North/East Region: support increased from 33% to 35%, and opposition decreased from 62% to 61%. Central: support decreased from 33% to 32%, and opposition increased from 61% to 62%. o South: both support (13%) and opposition (81%) remained the same

Although the department is always looking for ways to recruit more hunters and many see Sundays as the one day that teens and children don't have obligations for sporting events, we stand by the outcome of the Sunday hunting survey results conducted in 2021. This means that we are not supportive of allowing Sunday hunting in any fashion at the risk of losing opportunity to recreate on private land.

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