

Testimony of David Trahan, Executive Director, Sportsman's Alliance of Maine

Testimony in Support

LD 1652 An Act to Ensure a Reliable Funding Stream for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife  
Presented by David Trahan, Executive Director, Sportsman's Alliance of Maine  
January 23rd, 2012.

The honorable Senator Martin, Representative Davis, distinguished members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, I am David Trahan, Executive Director of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine and I am here to support LD 1652, An Act to Ensure a Reliable Funding Stream for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Thank you to Senate President, Kevin Raye for sponsoring this important bill. This bill is the collective effort of several prominent organizations, SAM, the Nature Conservancy, and Maine Audubon. We introduced this legislation for several reasons, first, to put an end to the destructive budget process that has diminished the mission of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, "to conserve, protect, and enhance the inland fisheries and wildlife resources."

Year after year, department resources have been diverted from department duties to coping with budget cuts and determining which user fees to increase, with no corresponding benefit.

This committee is forced to continue debating unpopular proposals like outdoor access cards, new registrations and expanded lotteries in an attempt to maintain important programs that should be funded from the general fund: search and rescue, endangered species, vernal pools to name a few.

It is time to end the debate about so-called consumptive and non-consumptive users by finding a way to responsibly fund this department that protects the funding of this vital agency, and insures the department has the resources necessary to responsibly manage the natural resources we all care about.

Recently, several legislators told me that this legislation would not pass because when talking about cuts to Health and Human Services and funding IF&W, legislators would choose to protect the poor.

Such a statement is totally unfair and I believe misrepresents the poor. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife National Survey, hunters and anglers spend \$498 million each year and generate nearly 15,790 jobs, many in economically depressed areas of the state. In total, the department activities contribute to \$2.4 billion in commerce.

Rural Maine families, in most cases, know they will face greater challenges than their fellow urban Mainers, like, scarce jobs, high taxes, as well as, higher transportation and energy costs.

Many still make the decision to endure the hardships, I believe in part to live amongst our magnificent natural resources, and experience a quality of life that values the small town experience.

Natural resources are the foundation and future of many of these communities and their future depends almost entirely on the wise management of these resources. The current state of our deer herd is a good example of the economic devastation that can occur when the department does not have the resources to properly manage wildlife. Healthy natural resources build healthy rural economies.

I have seen state budget surpluses and state budget deficits, and in the end, the results are always the same, this little department is always out in the cold, scrambling to stay afloat; thus, rural Maine has little economic opportunity.

It is my hope that the committee will allow a working group of interested parties to form and begin meeting to create a bill for the committee's consideration. If we are successful, generations to come will benefit, we stand ready to go to work.