

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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# **Report to the Joint Standing Legislative Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**

*In Response to Their Request of May 5, 2005  
For The Department to Conduct a Review of the Methods and Tools  
Employed by the Department to Achieve its Bear Management Goals*

## **SUMMARY**

As requested by the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the Department formed a committee of interested parties to review the methods and tools by which bears are legally taken in Maine, and to give input to the Department on methods and tools that may be modified to improve the current situation while continuing to achieve bear management goals. A committee was formed of stakeholders interested in bear management, and this committee met four (4) times. Many issues were discussed and these are detailed in this report and the attached minutes of the 4 meetings. As a result of this effort, the Department offers several recommendations for consideration to improve bear management in Maine. Two (2) of these recommendations involve rule changes, and 2 involve enhancing information that the Department uses to assess bear management issues.

SENATE

RUCE S. BRYANT, DISTRICT 14, CHAIR  
JOSEPH C. PERRY, DISTRICT 32  
CHANDLER E. WOODCOCK, DISTRICT 18

CURTIS C. BENTLEY, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST  
DARLENE SIMONEAU, COMMITTEE CLERK



STATE OF MAINE

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE

COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

HOUSE

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EARL E. RICHARDSON, GREENVILLE  
RICHARD M. CEBRA, NAPLES  
DAVID E. RICHARDSON, CARMEL

May 5, 2005

Roland Martin, Commissioner  
Department of Fisheries and Wildlife  
284 State Street  
41 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0041

RE: Review of Bear Harvesting Methods

Dear Commissioner Martin:

Given the large number of bear bills introduced this legislative session and the intense public debate surrounding the department's management of Maine's bear population, we are directing the department to conduct an in depth review of the methods and tools employed by the department to achieve its bear management goals. Specifically, the review should include but is not limited to the issues surrounding the harvest methods presented in the following bills introduced into the 122<sup>nd</sup> Legislature:

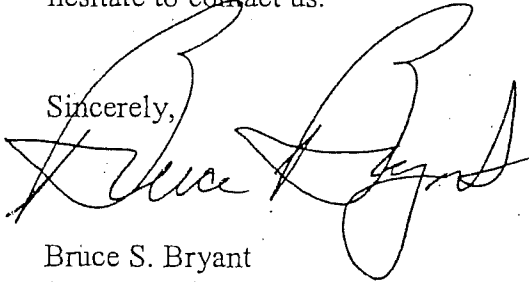
1. LD 48 – An Act to Ensure the Safe and Timely Retrieval of Wounded Bear;
2. LD 137 – An Act to Prohibit a Landowner from Charging a Fee for Bear Baiting;
3. LD 314 – An Act to Prohibit Bear Baiting;
4. LD 516 – An Act to Prohibit Bear Baiting within 100 yards of an Adjoining Property;
5. LD 628 – An Act to Amend the Bear Hunting Laws;
6. LD 1093 – An Act to Promote Public Safety by Banning the Feeding of Bears in the Wild;
7. LD 1319 – An Act to Ban the Use of Traps and Dogs in Bear Hunting; and

8. LD 1460 – An Act to Ban Bear Hunting with Traps Except to Protect the Public.

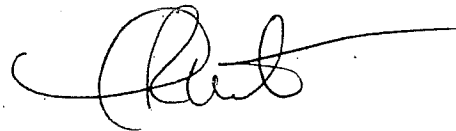
In conducting the review, the department should make every effort possible to collaborate with all interested parties to ensure the issues are thoroughly vetted. Based on this review, the department shall report back its findings and recommendations to this committee by January 15, 2006. Those recommendations should address how the issues presented in this letter can best be resolved including what can be done by rule, while meeting bear management goals.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Bruce S. Bryant  
Senate Chair



Thomas Watson  
House Chair

cc: Members, Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife



STATE OF MAINE  
 DEPARTMENT OF  
 INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
 284 STATE STREET  
 41 STATE HOUSE STATION  
 AUGUSTA, MAINE

JOHN ELIAS BALDACCI  
 GOVERNOR

04333-0041

ROLAND D. MARTIN  
 COMMISSIONER

August 24, 2005

Honorable Thomas R. Watson  
 State Representative  
 1565 Washington Street  
 Bath, ME 04530

Dear Representative Watson:

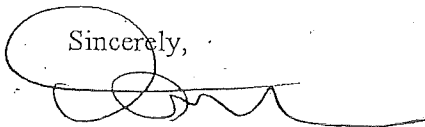
As you know, there were a large number of bills introduced this legislative session and intense debates about bear management in Maine. The Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife directed the Department to review, with a group of interested parties, all of the methods and tools used by the Department to achieve its bear management goals. Based on its own review and the input of the parties, the Department will report its findings and recommendations back to the Committee by January 15, 2006.

I would like to invite you, as House Chair of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, to participate with the Department in our review of bear management methods in Maine. You have shown an interest and the ability to offer constructive input and we would appreciate your help. I am anticipating perhaps 2 meetings where we can discuss, openly and respectfully, if there are ways to improve the methods used to manage bears while retaining the ability of the Department to reach management goals. There may be ways that the 3 main methods of taking bears - baiting, trapping, and hounds - can be improved upon, and that will be the basis for our discussions.

Ken Elowe, Director of the Bureau of Resource Management has been asked to take the lead and facilitate this important working group.

I have attached a copy of the Legislative Committee's directive to the Department. If you or a representative from your organization are interested in participating, please let Ken know as soon as possible (287-5261). We will try to set up the first meeting for late September or very early October. Thanks for your interest and I hope you will choose to help improve Maine's bear management.

Sincerely,

  
 Roland D. Martin  
 Commissioner

pc: Paul Jacques, Deputy Commissioner  
 Ken Elowe, Director, Bureau of Resource Management  
 Andrea Erskine, Assistant to the Commissioner



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## PROCESS

The Department formed a committee of interested parties to help discuss in detail and make recommendations to the Department on ways to improve current bear hunting and trapping methods. The following groups or individuals were invited to be members:

- Bruce Bryant, Senate Chair, Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (did not attend)
- Thomas Watson, House Chair, Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Skip Trask, Maine Professional Guides Association and Maine Trappers Association (MTA/MPGA)
- Robert Fisk, Jr., Maine Friends of Animals (MFOA)
- Daryl DeJoy, Wildlife Alliance of Maine (WAM)– Cecil Gray attended
- Debi Davidson, Isaac Walton League (IWLM)– Bob Bachorik attended
- Al Cowperthwaite, North Maine Woods (NMW)
- Robert Savage, Advisory Council, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (AC)
- Jen Burns, Maine Audubon (MAS)– Jody Jones attended
- Don Kleiner, Maine Bowhunters Association (MBA)– John Wardwell attended 2 mtgs
- George Smith, Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine (SAM)– Edye Cronk attended
- Norman Sanderson, Maine Tree Hounds Association (MTHA)

This committee met four (4) times (October 19, December 1, and December 15, 2005, and January 18, 2006), and discussed issues that individuals wanted to discuss, and the Department brought several other issues to the table for discussion. Summaries of each meeting are attached. Several other observers attended some or all of the meetings, but only one representative from each invited group participated in the discussions. At the first meeting, participants were invited to share what they hoped would come out of the meetings, and these comments are in the summary of the first meeting. Then we created a list of issues/potential improvements that were discussed in whatever detail the group wanted. Additional ideas for potential improvements were added at each meeting – in fact, the participants were charged with bringing ideas for improvements to each meeting.

Although straw polls were taken after discussing each issue, the polls were only to separate the ideas for improvements into three (3) initial categories:

- Those with strong agreement,
- Those with strong disagreement, and
- Ideas needing further discussion.

By the last meeting, all ideas could be put into categories of

- Strong agreement,
- Strong disagreement, or
- No clear group direction – mostly no strong agreement for or against.

## FINDINGS

Detailed meeting summaries are attached to this report that list attendees at each meeting and summaries of issues discussed by the group. The following issues were discussed over the course of the 4 meetings and are arranged by category of hunting or trapping method, where appropriate:

### General

There was considerable discussion at all meetings about hounds and trapping as a legitimate way to take bears. This led to in-depth discussions about hunter ethics, image, and fair-chase. Essentially, this committee again discussed all of the issues that were discussed in many different public and media forums during the bear referendum. The charge by the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (see attached) was to have the Department review all of the current bear management methods and recommend changes, if any, that could improve the way that bears are managed in Maine. Therefore, all of the issues surrounding bear baiting, trapping and using hounds were again discussed here. When it became apparent that there was strong disagreement within the committee that these general methods of take be allowed to continue, we moved to issues within each of the methods to see if it was possible to achieve agreement on smaller increments of possible improvements to the way the methods were used to take bears. These are listed below and also are contained within the summaries of each meeting (attached).

### Baiting

1. Eliminate baiting for bear – there was strong disagreement to consider eliminating baiting for bear.
2. Wounding of bears – the group had several recommendations for improving shot placement and hunter ethics, including:
  - Have guides stress hunter ethics to ensure quick, clean kills by their clients.
  - Reinforce hunter ethics/shot placement in hunter education programs.
  - Put a strong statement concerning shot placement in IF&W's hunting law book.
  - Assemble a short publication discussing ethical hunting and shot placement for distribution to guides and hunters. This should include information on recovery of animals as well.
3. Presentation of bait – no recommendation for limiting the amount or kind of bait.

4. Problems with cleanup of bait – Committee decided that the current laws that address cleanup take care of landowners’ concerns. No additional recommendations were made.
5. Allocation of bait site permits on IFW lands – strong agreement from group that creating an allocation system for IFW lands would not be an improvement.
6. Shorten the pre-baiting season from 4 weeks to 2 weeks – most thought this would not be an improvement – no recommendation.
7. IFW should conduct studies to better understand the impact of bait on bear biology – there was strong agreement that the Department needs to have better information on the impact of bait on bear behavior, health, reproduction, and survival.
8. Assemble a group to develop recommendations to improve the bait permit allocation process in North Maine Woods and other corporate timberlands – the committee did not strongly decide that this would be an improvement, although some thought it would be worthwhile.
9. Potential for Disease Transmission by concentrating bears – biologically, this is not an issue at this time. No recommendation.

## **Hounds**

1. Prohibit the use of hounds for hunting bear – there was strong disagreement from some within the committee on the use of hounds for hunting bear. There was also strong support for the use of hounds by others. No recommendation.
2. Prohibit the use of radio collars on dogs while hunting bear – Most thought this would not be an improvement since the collars allow hunters to gather their hounds more efficiently at the end of the day, helping to keep dogs from running at large.
3. No striking hounds off of bait sites – The committee strongly agreed that this would not be an improvement.
4. Prohibit shooting a bear out of a tree – Most thought this would not be an improvement.
5. Prohibit the use of hounds from outside of Maine – most thought this would not be an improvement.



## Trapping

1. Prohibit bear trapping – There was strong disagreement within the committee on this issue. No recommendation.
2. Put a moratorium on bear trapping with the condition that no additional citizen initiative referendums affecting bear management would occur – There was no support for this idea.
3. Need Best Management Practices (BMP's) for bear trapping – There was general support for developing and promoting/requiring BMP's for bear trapping, similar to what has been done for some other species that are trapped regularly.
4. Need to know more about the methods used by bear trappers – There was strong agreement that the Department should collect more information on the number of bear trappers, their effort, and the equipment that they use.
5. Prohibit the use of the steel-jawed foothold trap for taking bear – There was fairly strong agreement in the committee that this would be an improvement, since cage-type live traps and cable foot snares are readily available and proven effective for taking bear.
6. Reduce the current 2-trap limit for bear to 1 trap – There was a majority of the committee that thought this would be an improvement.

## Summary of Findings

### Items of strong agreement:

- Baiting of bears should be retained as a method to meet management needs.
- The Department's assessment of bear numbers would not change committee members' opinions about methods of take; therefore, there was no need to debate IF&W's bear population estimates.
- Society's perception of hunters and trappers could be improved.
- A portion of the State's Sales Tax should augment IF&W's budget.
- The Department should conduct studies to better understand the impact of bait types and amounts on bear behavior, health, reproduction rates, and survival rates.
- Striking of hounds off bait sites should be allowed.
- Prohibiting radio collars on hounds would not be an improvement.
- Prohibiting hunters from shooting bears out of trees would not be an improvement.
- Prohibiting the use of hounds from outside of Maine would not be an improvement.
- There should not be a moratorium on bear trapping conditioned on no additional citizen initiatives on bear management coming forward.
- The Department should collect information on the number of bear trappers, their effort, and the equipment that they use.
- Steel-jawed bear traps should not be allowed for taking bear.
- The number of bear traps allowed to be set should be reduced from the current 2 to 1 trap.

### Items of strong disagreement:

- No agreement of group to eliminate hound hunting for bears.
- No agreement of group to eliminate trapping for bears.
- No agreement of group to promote organized drives as a hunting method.

### Items of no clear group direction:

- Limiting the amount or type of bait used to hunt bears.
- Assembling a group to develop possible recommendations to improve the bait allocation process in North Maine Woods and other corporate timberlands.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED**

The Department reviewed all of the issues and discussions by the committee at the 4 meetings, and decided that there are several recommendations that have merit.

Although funds may not be available for some time, we recognize that many of the perceptions and concerns about baiting for bears could be alleviated by better information on the impacts of bait on bear behavior, reproduction, and survival. Also, there is no real information on the number of bear trappers, the effort that they expend trying to trap bears, and the equipment that they use. They take a very small proportion of the annual bear kill, so their collective impact has been largely ignored in the past. However, the issue of bear trapping is important, and the Department should collect information to guide discussions about bear trapping based on facts.

There are 2 rule changes that we recommend be proposed to change by the Department. One is to reduce the current 2-trap limit on bear traps to 1. It is possible to take 2 bears in one night of trapping with 2 traps, and this places the trapper in a situation where he or she has exceeded the bag limit. One trap is still very effective for taking bears. The other rule change would prohibit the steel-jawed foothold trap for taking bears – limiting trappers to using either the cable foot snare, or cage-type live traps. Both of these trap types are readily available and very effective for taking bears. Both have been used for decades by bear researchers and managers all over the world for taking tens of thousands of bears unharmed. Work could certainly be done in the future to experiment with some of the newer steel-jawed traps for bears, and if designs proved effective, these could be allowed also. However, at this time, cable foot snares and cage-type traps are already thoroughly tested and proven.

### **Summary of Recommendations That Should Be Considered**

The following items require a change of current practices, and from the input and discussion of the committee, the Department recommends that these changes be made to improve upon the current methods used to take bear, and to enhance the scientific information that the Department uses to manage bears and bear hunters/trappers.

- Reduce the number of traps that trappers can use to trap bears from the current two (2) down to one (1) trap.
- Eliminate the steel-jawed foothold trap for bears – allow only cage-type live traps and cable foot snares.
  - The Department should conduct studies, if funding is available; to better understand the impact of bait types and amounts on bear behavior, health, reproduction rates, and survival rates.
  - The Department should collect information on the number of bear trappers, their effort, and the equipment that they use.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Department wishes to acknowledge the time, interest, and talents of the members of the bear management committee. The discussions were in-depth, passionate, and productive. There was a better understanding generated of the particular interests of the disparate groups by discussing the issues face-to-face. Although there were heated discussions at times, the Department appreciates the willingness of the participants to engage in a professional and respectful manner. Forums such as this are helpful in discovering small areas of agreement, and can better articulate interests instead of positions.

## List of Appendices

- I. **Summaries of the 4 bear working group meetings**
  
- II. **Statements requested for attachment by the Wildlife Alliance of Maine and the Maine Friends of Animals**

## **APPENDIX I**

**Summaries of the 4 bear working group meetings**

# Bear Working Group Meeting #1

October 19, 2005

1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Facilitator:** Ken Elowe, MDIFW

**Recorder:** Sandy Ritchie, MDIFW

**Next Meeting(s):** December 1st - 1:30 – 4:00 PM- Upstairs Conference Room, MDIFW Sidney HQ  
December 15<sup>th</sup> - 1:30 – 4:00 PM- Upstairs Conference Room, MDIFW Sidney HQ

**Participants:**

Bob Bachorik (Maine Chapter Izaak Walton League), Edey Cronk (Sportsman's Alliance of Maine), Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods), Bob Fisk (Maine Friends of Animals), Cecil Gray (Wildlife Alliance of Maine), Jody Jones (Maine Audubon), Norman Sanderson (Maine Tree Hound Association), Skip Trask (Maine Trappers Association / Maine Professional Guides Association), Representative Tom Watson (House Chair Legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee), and John Wardwell (Maine Bowhunters Association)

**Guests:**

Bill Randall and Don Helstrom

**MDIFW:**

Commissioner Martin (briefly), Andrea Erskine (briefly), Ken Elowe, Mark Stadler, Sandy Ritchie, Rich Dressler, Wally Jakubas, and Randy Cross

**Action Items:**

- IF&W will provide information on CWD.
- IF&W will provide information on MDIFW's Bear Hunter Questionnaire – questions that are asked, years the survey was conducted, and any summaries of the results.
- IF&W will provide CDs of the public opinion survey conducted in the northeast states for the Northeast Conservation Information and Education Association.
- IF&W will provide current rules and regulations for bear baiting, hounding, and trapping.
- IF&W will try to compile available information about the status of states that once had bear trapping but no longer do and the reasons for it.

## Meeting Summary

**1. Introductions:** Participants introduced themselves.

**2. Opening Remarks:** Commissioner Martin thanked everyone for coming and encouraged everyone to actively participate. He explained the legislative resolve and that the purpose of the Working Group was to review the harvest methods and tools used by the Department to achieve its bear management goals. MDIFW must report back its findings and recommendations to the Committee on Inland Fisheries and

Wildlife by January 15, 2006. Ken Elowe indicated that he didn't want to revisit the broad referendum questions of hunting bears over bait, by the use of hounds, or by trapping; rather he encouraged a thorough discussion of the issues within these three methods and opportunities for improvement. He also mentioned that Department staff were only present to provide technical assistance if needed.

**3. Maine's Bear Management Program:** Mark Stadler presented a short powerpoint presentation describing Maine's bear management program (copy attached).



**4. What do you hope comes out of these meetings?** Ken posed this question to each of the participants.

- Bob Bachorik (Izaak Walton League)
  - Improve society's perception of hunters.
  - Ensure that hunting is based on sound biological and scientific principles and not on politics.
- Edye Cronk (Sportsman's Alliance of Maine)
  - Opportunities for sportsmen.
- Skip Trask (Maine Trappers Assn./Maine Professional Guides Assn.)
  - Management is based on biology, and if changes are made they should be necessary and biologically sound.
- John Wardwell (Maine Bowhunters Assn.)
  - More opportunity for bowhunters.
  - Management based on science and biology.
  - Bear hunting is important economically to taxidermists.
- Cecil Gray (Wildlife Alliance of Maine)
  - Fair chase
  - Encourage IF&W to do more studies (effects of baiting on disease transmission, tooth decay, others)
  - Refine and track bear population estimate.
  - Opposes use of dogs because they harass the bear before it is killed.
  - No biological reason for trapping – animal harassment.
  - No intentions to do away with hunting. Concerned that the use of dogs and trapping will stir folks up enough that we could lose bear hunting as a result.
  - Maine is the only state that allows bear trapping; it is an embarrassment.
- Representative Tom Watson
  - Wants to do what is politically feasible, and will provide the group feedback on the political reality of issues.
- Jody Jones (Maine Audubon)
  - Wants to ensure that methods used to harvest bears do not pose any undo risk to species at risk.
- Norman Sanderson (Maine Tree Hound Association)
  - There is more hound hunting occurring in the U.S. than any other type of hunting.
  - Hound hunters are a good group.
  - Bears don't tree as easily as many think; dogs don't bother bears that much.
  - Hound hunting allows the hunter to be selective and to choose whether or not to shoot the treed bear.
  - Wants the working group to come up with recommendations to benefit the resource.
- Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods)
  - North Maine Woods is in agreement with Maine's current bear management program.
  - Current harvesting methods maintain the black bear population at a reasonable level.
  - Under a program initiated in 1987, NMW now manages the placement of nearly 3,000 bear bait sites. This program has reasonable land management policies, which dovetail with Maine's bear management regulations. There is very little controversy related to hunting bears on lands managed by NMW.
  - Don't regulate hound hunting except to avoid disturbing bait sites.
  - Bear hunting is economically important to people and businesses in northern Maine.
- Bob Fisk (Maine Friends of Animals)
  - This is an opportunity for us to seriously discuss ways to improve the current situation.
  - This is also an opportunity for IF&W to show some flexibility.
  - Don't rehash what is, focus on what might be changed.
  - The Department must begin to consider making animal cruelty a component in its

consideration of wildlife management decisions, especially when there is questionable need for the practice.

- Nonconsumptive users of wildlife should not be shut out of management decisions.
- Keep baiting but eliminate trapping and hounding, the two practices that are the most inhumane and account for less than 15% of the annual harvest.

**5. Open discussion concerning changes and improvements to bear hunting methods:** The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a listing of potential changes and improvements to bear hunting methods. Items discussed thus far are organized below into three categories:

- Items where there was strong disagreement
- Items where there was strong agreement
- Items requiring further discussion

**Items where there was strong disagreement**

- Eliminate hounding
- Eliminate trapping
- Promote organized drives

**Items where there was strong agreement**

- The Department's assessment of bear numbers would not change people's opinions about methods; therefore there was no need to debate IF&W's bear population estimate.
- Society's perception of hunters and trappers could be improved.
- Baiting should be retained as a method to meet management needs.

**Items requiring further discussion**

- Changes to improve baiting – problems with cleanup, competition for sites, length of pre-baiting season
- Court system could be more responsive.
- Perception that bear trapping is non-selective
- Don't limit our discussions to what we can do legislatively.
- Require bear trappers to obtain a permit in order to track participation, effort, and success.
- Lack of knowledge about trapping and hunting with hounds may be clouding opinions. Need information on how these methods are conducted, including tending requirements, and trappers release of nontargets.
- Require a specialized bear license (for trappers and hunters with hounds) with training and tending requirements.
- Provide a place on a big game hunting license for a deer hunter to indicate his or her desire to shoot a bear incidental to deer hunting.

Note: This list is not exhaustive. Please come prepared with additional suggestions.

**6. Next Meeting Dates:** December 1<sup>st</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup> from 1:30 – 4:00 PM - Upstairs Conference Room, Department of Inland and Fisheries Region B Headquarters in Sidney.

## Bear Working Group Meeting #2

December 1, 2005  
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Facilitator:** Ken Elowe, MDIFW

**Recorder:** Sandy Ritchie, MDIFW

**Next Meeting(s):** December 15<sup>th</sup> - 1:30 – 4:00 PM - Upstairs Conference Room, MDIFW Sidney HQ

**Participants:**

Bob Bachorik (Maine Chapter Izaak Walton League), Edye Cronk (Sportsman's Alliance of Maine), Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods), Bob Fisk (Maine Friends of Animals), Cecil Gray (Wildlife Alliance of Maine), Jody Jones (Maine Audubon), Norman Sanderson (Maine Tree Hound Association), Bos Savage (Fish & Wildlife Advisory Council), Skip Trask (Maine Trappers Association / Maine Professional Guides Association), Representative Tom Watson (House Chair Legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee), and John Wardwell (Maine Bowhunters Association)

**Guests:**

Don Helstrom

**MDIFW:**

Ken Elowe, Mark Stadler, Sandy Ritchie, Jennifer Vashon, and Randy Cross

**Action Items:**

- **Al Cowperthwaite** - develop a list of what bear guides are currently doing in their camps to reinforce hunter ethics with sports.
- **Entire Working Group** - think about the various issues discussed to date concerning each of the bear harvest methods, especially about the proposals and recommendations offered at the December 1 meeting, and identify where there is enough agreement to get group movement.

### Meeting Summary

**1. Introductions:** Participants introduced themselves.

**2. October 19 Meeting Summary:** Ken went through the summary of the October 19 meeting to ensure that it accurately reflected the discussion. Representative Watson indicated that the intent of the legislative resolve was that everything (including revisiting the referendum issues) is open for discussion. Ken Elowe indicated that it wasn't going to be a productive use of everyone's time to eliminate harvest methods that voters upheld, but we could discuss it if the group thought otherwise. Representative Watson also stated that the Fish and Wildlife Committee wanted to see the number of working group members in support of and opposed to each recommendation from the group. Bob Fisk stated, and Skip Trask agreed, that the report to the Fish and Wildlife Committee was to be MDIFW's and the working group is serving in an advisory capacity.

**3. Discussion of Issues Associated with Each of the Harvest Methods:** Ken posed three questions to

the group and took a straw poll before discussing the broader issues associated with each of the harvest methods.

- A. If hunting bear over bait could be done the way you envision it, do you think baiting is a legitimate harvest method for bear?

Yes: 8      No: 1      Abstain: 2

- B. If hunting bear with hounds could be done the way you envision it, do you think hunting with hounds is a legitimate harvest method for bear?

Yes: 7      No: 1      Abstain: 3

- C. If bear trapping could be done the way you envision it, do you think trapping is a legitimate harvest method for bear?

Yes: 6      No: 2      Abstain: 3

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the broader issues associated with baiting and trapping before time expired. We did not attempt to capture all of the discussion regarding each issue; rather, we focused on capturing specific recommendations.

### BAITING ISSUES

- o Wounded bears
- o Presentation of bait (ground vs. containers, manmade foods vs. natural foods)
- o Problems with cleanup
- o Quantity of bait used
- o Competition for bait sites
- o Length of pre-baiting season
- o Potential for transmission of disease by concentrating bears

### **Wounded Bears**

#### Recommendations

- o Stress hunter ethics - guides need to work with their sports to ensure a good, clean, and quick kill.
- o Reinforce hunter ethics in hunter education programs.
- o Put a strong statement in MDIFW's hunting law book concerning the placement of a good, clean shot.
- o Assemble a short publication discussing ethical hunting and shot placement for distribution to hunters and guides. This document should be similar to information provided in MDIFW's moose and turkey hunting guides and should include information on recovery of animals as well.

#### Action Items

- o Al Cowperthwaite will be meeting with the Bear Hunt Improvement Council and with the Council's input, will develop a list of what bear guides are currently doing in their camps to reinforce hunter ethics with sports.

### **Presentation of Bait**

Concern was expressed about the lack of studies concerning any health effects from the use of bait. Discussed the use of pails and barrels – it was mentioned that their use was good for gauging the size of the bear and that cleanup was easier.

Recommendations – none

### **Problems with Cleanup**

There are laws that address cleanup, and from a landowner's perspective cleanup issues have been addressed.

Recommendations – no additional action needed

### **Quantity of Bait Used**

Randy Cross commented that whether or not a sow has cubs or self-aborts is more a function of mast (nuts and seeds) consumed than bait. The pattern of cub production and survival following good mast years seems to hold true. MDIFW telemetry studies indicate that presence of bait is not preventing early den entry.

Recommendations

- Continue to monitor MDIFW's bear study to determine if any trend changes in birth rates and cub survival can be attributed to bait.

### **Competition for Bait Sites**

Recommendations – none

### **Length of Pre-baiting Season**

Recommendations – Table for now but retain as a discussion item if we ever need to shorten the season.

### **Potential for Transmission of Disease by Concentrating Bears**

Ken Elowe stated that biologically it is not an issue at this time.

Recommendations – none

### **TRAPPING ISSUES**

- Efficiency and effectiveness of current traps used
- Is trapping necessary for bear management (excluding its use in MDIFW's bear study)
- Inhumane
- Unethical

- Need to know more about what types of traps are being used and how they are being used
- Bad perception of bear trapping among nonhunters in Maine
- Need Best Management Practices (BMPs) for bear trapping

A lengthy discussion ensued on a variety of issues concerning bear trapping. Two proposals were offered for consideration by the group, but time expired before anything was resolved.

- Representative Watson suggested placing a moratorium on bear trapping with the condition that no additional citizen initiative referendums affecting game management would occur.
- Ken Elowe suggested eliminating the use of the steel jawed trap and reducing the cable trap limit from 2 to 1.

**4. Next Meeting: December 15<sup>th</sup> - 1:30 – 4:00 PM - Upstairs Conference Room, MDIFW Sidney HQ**

**Your assignment for the next meeting:** think about the various issues discussed to date concerning each of the bear harvest methods, especially about the proposals and recommendations offered at the December 1 meeting, and identify where there is enough agreement to get group movement.

## Bear Working Group Meeting #3

December 15, 2005

1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Facilitator:** Ken Elowe, MDIFW

**Recorder:** Sandy Ritchie, MDIFW

**Next Meeting:** January 18<sup>th</sup> - 1:30 – 4:00 PM - Upstairs Conference Room, MDIFW Sidney HQ

**Participants:**

Bob Bachorik (Maine Chapter Izaak Walton League), Edye Cronk (Sportsman's Alliance of Maine), Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods), Bob Fisk (Maine Friends of Animals), Cecil Gray (Wildlife Alliance of Maine), Jody Jones (Maine Audubon), Don Kleiner (Maine Bowhunters Association), Norman Sanderson (Maine Tree Hound Association), Bos Savage (Fish & Wildlife Advisory Council), Skip Trask (Maine Trappers Association / Maine Professional Guides Association), and Representative Tom Watson (House Chair Legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee)

**Guests:**

Don Helstrom, Bill Randall, and John Wardwell

**MDIFW:**

Ken Elowe, Mark Stadler, Sandy Ritchie, Jennifer Vashon, and Randy Cross

**Action Items:**

- **MDIFW** – distribute minutes of December 9, 2005 Bear Hunt Improvement Council Meeting.
- **Entire Working Group** – for the 18 January meeting, provide at least one suggestion to improve the method(s) by which bears are harvested in Maine.

### Meeting Summary

**1. Introductions:** Participants introduced themselves.

**2. Bear Hunt Improvements Discussion:** Ken indicated that MDIFW had come up with a number of suggestions to potentially improve the image of bear hunting in Maine. Ken asked the Working Group to consider each suggestion independently and ask the question: "will the suggestion contribute toward making bear hunting/trapping better than it is now?" Ken indicated that he was looking for increments of improvement; regardless of how small they may be, knowing that someone's opinion, viewpoint, or ultimate action may not change. The group agreed to give Ken's exercise a try, beginning with trapping.

Trapping:

1. Reduce the current 2-trap limit to 1 trap.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 6

No = 3

No opinion = 2

2. Eliminate the steel jawed foothold trap, allowing only the use of cables and cage traps.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 7

No = 3

No opinion = 1

3. Need more information on number of trappers, methodology, and selectivity.

This was noted as a comment but no straw poll was taken.

#### Hunting Bear with Hounds:

1. No striking off bait.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 0

No = 11

No opinion = 0

2. Prohibit the use of radio collars on dogs.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 2

No = 8

No opinion = 1

3. Can't shoot a bear out of a tree – suggested by Representative Watson.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 3

No = 7

No opinion = 1

4. Prohibit the use of dogs from outside Maine – suggested by Cecil Gray.

The suggestion was made as the meeting was adjourning; no straw poll was taken.

Bob Fisk stated that there would be less of a chance that a referendum to eliminate hunting bears over bait would occur if the Working Group proposed eliminating trapping and hunting bears with hounds.



Hunting Bears over Bait: Before the meeting adjourned, MDIFW provided several ideas pertaining to baiting for the Working Group to consider and discuss at the next meeting:

1. Limit the amount of bait to two 5-gallon pails.
2. Develop a process for allocating bait permits on Department lands.
3. Shorten the pre-bait season from 1 month to 2 weeks.

A fourth suggestion was offered by Cecil Gray.

4. Revisit the process used to allocate bait permits on large ownerships.

**3. Next Meeting: January 18<sup>th</sup> - 1:30 – 4:00 PM - Upstairs Conference Room, MDIFW Sidney HQ**

**Your assignment for the next meeting**: Provide at least one suggestion to improve the method(s) by which bears are harvested in Maine.

## Bear Working Group Meeting #4

January 18, 2006  
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Facilitator:** Ken Elowe, MDIFW

**Recorder:** Sandy Ritchie, MDIFW

**Next Meeting:** No meeting is scheduled at this point. IF&W will develop a draft report for the legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee, forward it the Bear Working Group in advance for review, and inquire as to the need for a fifth meeting.

**Participants:**

Bob Bachorik (Maine Chapter Izaak Walton League), Edye Cronk (Sportsman's Alliance of Maine), Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods), Bob Fisk (Maine Friends of Animals), Cecil Gray (Wildlife Alliance of Maine), Don Kleiner (Maine Bowhunters Association), Norman Sanderson (Maine Tree Hound Association), Skip Trask (Maine Trappers Association / Maine Professional Guides Association), and Representative Tom Watson (House Chair Legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee)

**Guests:**

Don Helstrom, Bill Randall, Roberta Scruggs, George Smith, and John Wardwell

**MDIFW:**

Ken Elowe, Mark Stadler, Sandy Ritchie, and Jennifer Vashon

**Action Items:**

- **MDIFW** – develop a draft report for the legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee and forward it the Bear Working Group in advance for review.

## Meeting Summary

### 1. Reviewed summary of Meeting #3.

**2. Roundtable Regarding Suggestions to Improve Bear Hunting and Trapping:** Ken asked each Working Group member for suggestions to improve the methods by which we currently harvest bears.

**Bob Fisk (Maine Friends of Animals)** – Eliminate trapping and the use of hounds (see attached handout).

**Bob Bachorik (Maine Chapter Izaak Walton League)** – Take whatever steps are necessary to avoid future referendums.

**Don Kleiner (Maine Bowhunters Association)** – Improve the public's understanding of and participation in bear hunting and trapping.

**Edye Cronk (Sportsman's Alliance of Maine)** – Keep things as is for all methods.

**Skip Trask (Maine Trappers Association / Maine Professional Guides Association)** – Require bear traps to have a poundage adjustment to avoid taking cubs and the incidental take of nontargets. Investigate new trapping technology, including the use of coil springs.

**Norman Sanderson (Maine Tree Hound Association)** – No additional suggestions.

**Representative Tom Watson (House Chair Legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee)** – Adopt Skip's suggestion concerning a trap poundage adjustment and reduce the number of traps from two to one.

**Cecil Gray (Wildlife Alliance of Maine)** – Explore ways to reduce/eliminate the amount of bait ingested by bears (e.g., use of scents). Need a fairer way to allocate bait permits. Eliminate the use of bait, hounds, and traps. Conduct studies on the affects of bait on bears.

**Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods)** – Supports Skip's suggestion concerning a trap poundage adjustment.

**3. Continuation of Bear Hunt Improvements Discussion from Meeting #3:** In Meeting #3 we discussed a number of suggestions, many proposed by MDIFW, to potentially improve the image of bear hunting in Maine. For each suggestion, the group discussed whether there was a need and the advantages and disadvantages if implemented. Ken asked the Working Group to consider each suggestion independently and ask the question: "will the suggestion contribute toward making bear hunting/trapping better than it is now?" He indicated that he was looking for increments of improvement; regardless of how small they may be, knowing that someone's opinion, viewpoint, or ultimate action may not change.

Use of Hounds (continued from Meeting #3): Refer to Meeting #3 summary for Items 1-3.

#### 4. Prohibit the use of hounds from outside Maine.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 2

No = 6

No opinion = 1

Use of Bait:

#### 1. Limit the amount of bait to two, 5-gallon buckets on the ground at any one time.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 4

No = 3

No opinion = 2

2. IF&W should conduct studies to better understand the use of bait and its affect on bear biology?

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 9

No = 0

No opinion = 0

3. Develop a process for allocating bait permits on IF&W lands.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 0

No = 7

No opinion = 2

4. Shorten pre-baiting season from 4 weeks to 2 weeks.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 2

No = 5

No opinion = 2

5. A portion of the state's sales tax should augment IF&W's budget.

Yes = 9

No = 0

No opinion = 0

6. Assemble a group to develop possible recommendations to improve the bait permit allocation process.

Would this be an improvement?

Yes = 5

No = 3

No opinion = 1

A lengthy discussion on humaneness and ethics issues ensued as did a discussion that recommendations should be scientifically based.

**4. Next Steps:** MDIFW will develop a draft report for the legislative Fish and Wildlife Committee, forward it the Bear Working Group in advance for review, and poll participants to determine if another meeting is needed.

**APPENDIX II**

**Statements requested for attachment by the  
Wildlife Alliance of Maine and the  
Maine Friends of Animals**

**Bear Working Group Statement**

**by the  
Wildlife Alliance of Maine**

**January 18, 2006**

The Wildlife Alliance of Maine would like to thank the Department for inviting us to participate in the bear working group. We hope that it is a sign that the Department is going to begin to listen to all stakeholders, because by law, Maine's wildlife belongs to all Mainers. While we appreciate the opportunity to participate, we are very concerned about Maine's bear management and we believe that during this process the Department has not adequately listened to our concerns and has failed to propose needed changes in what is a very flawed program.

First off, let me say that the Wildlife Alliance of Maine opposes bear baiting, hounding and trapping and we believe these practices should stop immediately. Both hounding and trapping are inhumane and unsportsmanlike. Taken together, they serve no wildlife management purpose because they have little to no effect on the bear population. They exist simply because a small number of people practice these activities as barbaric hobbies.

Bear baiting, on the other hand, is more complex. In November 2004, more than 300,000 Maine voters told the State to stop bear baiting, hounding and trapping. Unfortunately, a slight majority of voters believed I&FW's claims that ending bear baiting would compromise their ability to effectively manage bears. The voters were misled by misinformation. In fact, bear baiting is not a tool for controlling bear numbers. It is a tool for growing bear numbers and for producing trained bears that can be easily shot, primarily by out of state hunters. This puts money in the pockets of guides, outfitters, sporting camp owners, property owners, and the State. In other words, this leads to the thinking that this is more about money management instead of what is best for wildlife management. This also runs hand in hand with another egregious aspect of bear baiting; the takeover of a prized public resource by large commercial interests such as the land consortium known as the North Maine Woods.

Maine's bear population has not decreased or been controlled as bear baiting has increased. Instead, the bear population has grown 28% since 1990 and bear range has expanded to virtually the entire state. This is not good management. This is not good management when there are more than six hundred documented nuisance bear reports to the warden service in one year, as there were in 2004. This is not good management when bears come into towns looking for food because they have been trained to look for and expect sugared treats from people. Maine's bear feeding program is a disaster waiting to happen, and when it does, the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's politically and economically driven bear management policies will likely be to blame.

Maine's Black Bear Management System was last updated in 1988, some 18 years ago. The Black Bear Assessment and Strategic Plan was last updated in 1999. Why is it that neither document makes any mention nor gives any consideration to the potential impacts of Maine's bear feeding program on bears, other wildlife, and humans? Last March, during a public hearing, The Wildlife

Alliance of Maine asked this very question again while testifying in favor of a bill it sponsored to ban the feeding of bears. Once again we received no answer. We are again asking what are the impacts of this feeding program on bear behavior, reproduction and health? We know that well fed bears produce more cubs. We know that feeding bears sugar promotes tooth decay and compromises their ability to utilize natural foods. How many bears are feeding at bait sites and to what extent do they rely on human food for their survival? How many of these bears later become "nuisance" bears? How many cubs are learning to feed at bait sites, and in essence, being trained to serve as easy targets? Does baiting bears promote the spread of disease among bears and other wildlife species? To what extent has this feeding program grown Maine's bear population and to what extent will it decrease when feeding is stopped? It's time to start basing bear management on science.

The Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has publicly stated that it will update its bear management system. Unfortunately, the Department did not discuss or permit any discussions of substantive changes to its bear management system during the deliberations of this working group.

The Wildlife Alliance of Maine believes that there is no compromise when it comes to bear hounding and trapping. Both must stop. We believe, however, that there is a reasonable compromise with regarding to bear baiting. We would not oppose the use of scent baits for bear. We would also not oppose the placement of bait in bear proof containers. This may result in improved hunter success as opposed to using nothing, yet it would not result in trained bears that come to feed day after day and are rewarded with a bullet. It would not produce more cubs and it would not produce nuisance bears with rotten teeth. It will force hunters to utilize some skill and return the "sport" to the term "sportsman".

We must also mention the loaded numbers on this committee. The deck was stacked from the get go and by doing this significant compromise was preordained to not occur. Instead we have listened to Mr. Elowe suggest possible changes to the bear statutes that have no real substance or importance. Offering the elimination of steel jaw traps and a few slight adjustments elsewhere is to only offer the blatant obvious and ignore any attempts and discussion of changes that are long overdue. This committee needs to be more balanced with representatives who are more knowledgeable, diverse, objective, and not welded to the monetary concerns of special interest groups. As it is now the outcome will follow the same trail the working groups and IF&W committees have for years. This will produce miniscule change, if any, (the thrown bone), the segregation of the process from the people's legislature, and in the end, a well spun report that claims progressive change from a working group that included many differing opinions and ideas, even that of so called animal rights groups. WAM is not animal rights but citizen's rights. In other words we have an end run. Last year one hell of a big defensive end named referendum showed up and met this facade



at the line of scrimmage. In lieu of democracy these tricks of the trade need to stop and in lieu of this continuance we at WAM want this report to be included verbatim in the official report that is sent to the committee. This will let our dissent to the vast majority of the outcome of this working group to be officially noted. Our name will not be used as promoters of IF&W's flawed program just because we sat here for four meetings that were for the most part a show of sustaining the current status quo of bear "management".

IFW itself states in its Wildlife Division Research and Management Report for 2004, "Never feed bears under any circumstances." We agree. It's time for IFW to listen to its own advice. By refusing to listen to reason and by refusing to base decisions on science, IFW is inviting another bear referendum. Next time, however, it will win because the voters will not be fooled again.



# MAINE FRIENDS OF ANIMALS

*SILENCE IS THE VOICE OF COMPLICITY.  
SPEAK UP FOR ANIMALS.*

February 23, 2006

Ken Elowe  
Director  
Bureau of Resource Management  
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife  
State House Station # 41  
Augusta, ME 04333-0041

Dear Ken:

In response to your email, I have enclosed what Maine Friends of Animals would like included in your report. Two pieces would suffice to accurately record our position: my opening remarks: "Remarks for DIF&W Bear Hunting Review Meetings", October 19, 2005, which I distributed at the opening meeting, and a February 1, 2006 Bangor Daily News Op-Ed. The Op-Ed is exactly what I would have written as our conclusion for this report / process. Those two documents represent our position before and after the meetings. Their inclusion would be appreciated.

Needless to say the draft report is nowhere close to what we advocated and I feel it was a missed opportunity for the Department. I did appreciate the invitation and forum; face to face meetings can only help. I also recognize the task that you had before you given the stakeholder positions, and felt you managed the meetings in an open and fair way. Unfortunately, the report as written does little or nothing, and is going to polarize sides with the Department, along with an inflexible hunting lobby, the opposition's focus in the future.

Sincerely,

*Robert Fisk*

Robert Fisk, Jr.  
President & Director

## REMARKS FOR DIF&W BEAR HUNTING REVIEW MEETINGS

By Robert Fisk, Jr.

President & Director of Maine Friends of Animals

October 19, 2005

I realize this is only an advisory working group, yet I believe the results of this review will have far more reaching consequences than may meet the eye.

Some suspect this Department directive to review the bear hunting practices skeptically as a political ploy to surreptitiously kill the bear hunting bills. But others view it as the first opportunity for us to sit at the same table together to seriously discuss ways to improve the current situation. I also believe it is an opportunity for the Department to show some flexibility that has not been present in the past. I am pleased to be here and see an opportunity for changes that can be met favorably by the committee and the parties involved. However, if the skeptics are proven right, I believe it will be a watershed in which the relationship between hunters and non-hunters will be more strained than ever before. If the Department's report is essentially a whitewash or status quo document that has no meaningful changes, then those who came into this with an open mind will be hardened as never before. They will leave this process knowing that the proprietary and inflexible attitude of certain hunting groups and the Department make them incapable of ending any hunting practice no matter how cruel, unethical, or unnecessary it may be. The ball is squarely in your court and I hope you will make the most of it.

We can evaluate and assess wildlife management of bears ad infinitum and recite various studies, but all the arguments have been thoroughly discussed during the referendum. In the limited time we will have as a working group, I hope that we do not rehash what is and focus on what might be changed. Therefore, I would like to direct my remarks to two issues that, in my view, are essential if progress is to be made.

The first is the fundamental reason why we had a referendum and one which the Department must begin to consider: making animal cruelty a component in its consideration of wildlife management decisions, especially when there is questionable need for the practice. The Department often comments that cruelty is "subjective." Over 500 Mainers who collected a record number of signatures to put the issue on the ballot surely don't think it is subjective. Cruelty is not abstract; it is clearly defined in law and in our moral beliefs.

Let me give you one example: The Department sanctioned coyote snaring, an indefensible program that was ineffectual, extremely cruel, and a waste of taxpayers' dollars and the department's time. As you know, a snare is a lethal wire device intended to catch and strangle a coyote within a few minutes. As you also know, your own department necropsy report indicated that 2/3 of the animals did not die a quick and humane death. From that report: "hemorrhaging was evident in most of the coyotes' swollen heads. Their eyes and mouths were bloody, their lips split and their teeth broken from trying to chew their way

out of the snare. And in many cases, because the animal was not even dead when the snarer returned, it was clubbed to death.” One only can imagine how many blows the animal received while moving to escape and snare and the fatal beating. If this was done to a domestic dog, the person would surely be prosecuted for aggravated animal cruelty, a felony offense. A coyote is 99.5% genetically the same animal as your pet dog -- 99.5% the same animal.

During the bear referendum campaign, I debated the Director of the Wildlife Division of this Department at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Presque Isle. A woman at the meeting mentioned to him that in looking through the literature she found some of it quite cruel --- would he comment on that? There was literally a 45-second pause while he paced back and forth in front of the podium before he attempted to make some abstract argument about what cruelty was. The length of the pause and the disjointed and evasive answer spoke volumes. Cruelty simply does not enter into the equation when considering wildlife management issues.

For those who make a living in caring for our wildlife, I find it difficult to understand why such practices don't bother you. You have seen or know of the pain, fear, agony, stress, and suffering of a bear in a leg hold trap or cable snare or a bear that being mercilessly attacked by a pack of hounds. Not to mention the dogs that can be maimed, crippled, or killed during the hunt. Hunters and an IF&W Department that have no sensitivity to animal suffering create a demeaning image to the general public.

I have said it before and I will say it again: We have never had an anti-hunting agenda and Maine Friends of Animals has never initiated one piece of anti-hunting legislation. What we are against are practices in which the degree of animal suffering is unacceptable. Our bear hunting practices meet that threshold of being unacceptable. And what makes it worse, is it is being done essentially so that out-of-state trophy hunters can take home a bear head or rug without having to hunt it.

Whether you think cruelty should be an issue or whether I think it is an issue doesn't matter as much as the fact that at least half of Maine citizens do, and that does matter. I think it would be political folly to think intransigent positions will continue to survive among the increased public awareness and a changing political environment.

This segues into the second point I would like to make --- politics.

I would like to read to you the following short Bangor Daily News editorial two days after the election: “The results on a proposal to ban baiting, hounding and trapping bears was 47% yes to 53% percent no, a vote much closer than this region might have guessed. Advocates of the ban need only look at Maine's shifting population to figure out that their time is coming – unless alert lawmakers act sooner. A sensible step would be to separate baiting from trapping and hounding, protect the first and ban the latter two.”

Whatever you make of the bear referendum and its results, one unquestionable result is that bear hunting in this state will never be viewed the same. The public awareness that came from the referendum changed all that. And with it, a much larger base of people who think non-consumptive users of wildlife should not be shut out of wildlife management decisions. If the Department shows a willingness to address the concerns of this growing number of citizens, it will go a long way in defusing this growing discontent and, in my view, head off future calls for more drastic changes.

This legislative directive to seriously review the bear hunting practices in this state is an opportunity for the Department and sportsmen to be viewed as positive agents of change. Doggedness and divisive positions are not ultimately in the best interest of hunters and hunting. If inflexible hunting groups and the Department continue to insist on no hunting restriction on any hunting practice, continue to exclude the non-consumptive users from any meaningful opportunity to address issues, and continue a rigid ideology that hardens positions, then I fear we will see a greater division and escalation of tensions between hunters and non-hunters, growing criticism of a department that continues to serve a special interest group and not all its citizens, more contentious legislation, and an increase in the calls for future referendums. Sides will be polarized like never before.

For over 15 years, the number of hunters has continued to decline while those appreciating Maine's wildlife without hunting them continues to grow to the point that they far outnumber hunters today. If the Department continues to put its head in the sand about these issues of inhumane and unethical forms of hunting, then they run the risk that there will be calls for more drastic changes. Maybe not next year or the year after, but these issues are not going to go away. Good politics would suggest that a compromise now would go a long way to avoid a political environment that will help no one.

So in closing, what would we like to see from this review? The same thing I proposed at the bear bill hearing and the position advanced in the Bangor Daily News editorial: simply keep the baiting and eliminate bear trapping and hounding.

We are the only state that still allows bear trapping and cable snaring. It is a practice that painted hunters in a very negative light during the referendum and is a practice that should have been banned long ago. If the Department does not recommend its complete elimination, it will be a clear signal that this process was not taken seriously.

These are the two practices we view as most inhumane, and we were often told by supporters and opponents that if the referendum was limited to these two practices, it would have easily passed. Hounding and trapping account for less than 15% of the bears taken each season. Throughout the referendum, the primary argument by this Department and opponents was that you needed these practices in order to manage the bear population. This argument cannot be advanced with this proposal, thus eliminating the fundamental issue from the Department to keep these practices. I also would imagine that 15% could be made up by more baiting and fair chase hunting.

To suggest that hunting bear with dogs is a tradition is an absolute falsehood. And the more recent practice of using radio telemetry collars makes bear hounding subject to criticism of being unethical and demeaning to true hunters. There are not that many bear guides that hound and they are limited in the number of clients they can serve, thus affecting very few if eliminated.

In conclusion ending bear trapping and hounding would not be a large sacrifice to guides or hunters and perhaps increase fair chase hunting, it would not affect bear management, it would provide proponents of bear hunting with an 85% win, it would give the Department an opportunity to be viewed as a positive agent for a change, and it would go a long way in diffusing the growing polarization of sides.

Attached to my remarks is our 'Facts Supporting a Ban on Hound Hunting of Bears'.

## FACTS SUPPORTING A BAN ON HOUND HUNTING OF BEARS

**Hound hunting is unsporting.** Hounds give relentless chase until the frightened and exhausted bear climbs a tree in a vain attempt to escape. The hunter then shoots the cornered bear at close range. This practice eliminates the concepts of fair chase and hunting skill.

**Hound hunting is inhumane.** If hounds overcome a bear that turns to face them the mauling of the animal can be merciless and protracted. Death is not always instantaneous. Bears shot in trees with bullets or arrows may suffer broken bones from the fall and may endure brutal dog attacks until the fatal shot is delivered. Bear cubs can also be maimed by hounds.

**Hound hunting is unnecessary.** Of the 27 states that allow bear hunting, 23 prohibit hounding, yet hunters in these states are able to take their bear without the use of dogs. Fair chase hunting has increased significantly in those states. In recent years, voters have overwhelmingly approved citizen initiatives to ban hound hunting in Colorado, Oregon, Massachusetts and Washington.

**Hound hunting is not a tradition.** Running a bear with dogs began in Maine less than 25 years ago. In 1982 only 152 bears were taken by hound hunting. The practice was driven by a few bear guides purely as a financial endeavor.

**Hound hunting has gone high-tech.** Today's hound hunter uses radio telemetry and CB radios, along with packs of trained dogs. Usually fitted with telemetry collars, the dogs can be easily monitored from a distance as they chase and eventually corner the bear. Hunters in vehicles track the dogs' progress, coordinate efforts via CB radios, and then go in for the kill at close range once the dogs have trapped their prey.

**Hound hunting is not needed for bear management.** There is considerable debate as to whether managing bear populations is needed at all, but even given the Department's contention that bear management is required, they can maintain that management goal with baiting. Baiting represents 85% of the animals killed each season. Hound hunting represents only 12 % of the bears taken. Increased fair chase hunting and baiting could replace that 12%.

**Hound hunting is highly stressful to wildlife.** Bear chases may last from 10 minutes to a day or longer and cover many miles. Long chases can severely stress bears, cause overheating and potential brain damage. During chases, mother and young may become permanently separated and the cubs may succumb to starvation, exposure and predation.

**Hound hunting leads to trespassing and property damage.** The hounding of any animal can take an unpredictable course causing the wild animal, the dogs and the hunters to become a nuisance or a threat to public and private lands. Hounds will also chase, harass, injure and kill other wildlife and domestic animals.

**Hound hunting has little economic value.** Hound hunting is done by a relatively small number of guides. Given the nature of the practice it limits the number of opportunities a guide can provide the service. Guides in other states have significantly increased fair chase hunting which Maine guides can do as well. A ban on hound hunting of bear would have no meaningful financial impact on guides, ancillary businesses or the State.

**Hound hunting is cruel to the dogs.** If a bear turns to fight dogs can be maimed, crippled, brutally mauled or killed. There is also the issue of handling the dogs. A nearly 50-year former Maine guide, trapper and bear hunter reported: "I've seen hunters beat their dogs so badly that it made me cringe. I used to have friends who I would not go hunting with because they were so cruel to their dogs. I've seen hounds kicked so hard or beaten with a stiff club that ribs were broken."

**Hound hunting gives hunting a bad image.** The dictionary defines "hunt" as 1. "to pursue (game or wild animals) for food or sport" or 2. "to seek out, to search for". Pursuit, the actual chase, precedes the kill, without it hunting is merely killing. Hunting without restrictions on how we pursue game loses its meaning. A hunter earns the privilege to take an animal's life by mastering the skills of the hunt. In hounding the only hunter is the dogs. Finding a terrorized bear treed by a pack of hounds and shooting it at point blank range demeans all hunting.



# Bangor Daily News

Founded in 1889

TODD BENOIT  
EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

SUSAN YOUNG  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

RICHARD SHAW  
EDITORIAL PAGE ASSISTANT

P.O. Box 1329, Bangor, Maine 04402-1329

Tel. 990-8000, fax 941-9476, e-mail address letters@bangordailynews.net

ROBERT FISK JR.

## 10 ideas on bear hounding, trapping

**T**he fallout of the close election to ban the hunting of bears with bait, hounds and traps was the submittal of eight different bear bills to the Legislature last year. The Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, instead of addressing them, directed the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to seriously review all bear-hunting practices while involving all the stakeholders. This "bear working group" has been meeting since early October. The DIF&W will consider suggestions from this advisory group and make its report to the committee this legislative session.

Whatever you make of the bear referendum and its results, one unquestionable result is that bear hunting in this state will never be viewed the same. The public awareness that came from the referendum changed all that. It is far more difficult for intransigent positions to survive among the increased public awareness and a changing political environment. If the department's report is essentially a whitewash or status quo document that has no meaningful changes, then those who went into this process open-minded will be hardened like never before.

A Bangor Daily News editorial two days after the election read: "The results on a proposal to ban baiting, hounding and trapping bears was 47 percent Yes to 53 percent No, a vote much closer than this region might have guessed. Advocates of the ban need only look at Maine's shifting population to figure out that their time is coming — unless alert lawmakers act sooner. A sensible step would be to separate baiting from trapping and hounding, protect the first and ban the latter."

That is exactly what proponents for change have advanced in these advisory meetings. Representatives from Maine Friends of Animals, The Izaak

Walton League and The Wildlife Alliance of Maine have put forth that position as a very reasonable compromise that would go a long way in stemming a growing divide.

Ten considerations for the DIF&W on ending bear hounding and trapping:

1. These methods are very unsporting. The common thread in both "hunting" practices, as well as with baiting, is that there is no hunt or fair chase in killing a bear at point-blank range with its head in a bait bucket, treed by hounds or agonizing in a leghold trap.

2. Cruelty resonates with the public. Even if the department and the hunting lobby do not feel bear trapping or dog and bear-cub fights are cruel, the vast majority of Maine citizens do.

3. There should be no financial loss to the department as baiting and fair-chase licenses can easily make up any decrease in numbers.

4. Hounding and trapping make up only 15 percent of the animals taken. Questionable bear management arguments cannot be used, particularly when those numbers could be taken by fair-chase hunters who make up all the bear hunting in states like Washington, Oregon and Colorado.

5. These practices are controversial among hunters. There is an increasing divide about ethical hunting practices.

6. Public opinion. Opinion about these issues will never be the same after the bear referendum and it would behoove the department to not continue to disregard the growth of nonconsumptive wildlife users who are increasingly outnumbering sportsmen.

7. Nonconsumptive users like wildlife viewers, kayakers, primitive outdoor campers, bird watchers, hikers and wildlife photographers are being shut out of wildlife decisions by a hunting lobby and its proprietary attitude. If this bear working group does not provide something meaningful, further division among hunters

and nonhunters will increase.

8. The image of Maine hunting is that of control by an extreme hunting lobby. Of the 27 states that allow bear hunting, 23 prohibit hounding and Maine remains the only state in the nation that still allows the barbaric practice of trapping a bear. The bear referendum unfortunately painted all hunters as inhumane and unethical — banning these two more egregious forms of hunting would go a long way to reverse this negative image.

9. Hounds will also chase, harass, injure and kill other wildlife and domestic animals, thus becoming a nuisance or threat to public and private lands.

10. Ending trapping and hounding is politically the smart thing to do. There is little to lose and much to be gained.

The legislative directive to seriously review the bear-hunting practices in this state is an opportunity for the department and sportsmen alike to be viewed as positive agents of change. Doggedness with divisive positions is not in the best interest of hunters and hunting.

If inflexible hunting groups and the department continue to insist on no hunting restriction on any hunting practice, continue to exclude the non-consumptive users from any meaningful opportunity to address issues and continue a rigid ideology that hardens positions, then I fear we will see a greater division and escalation of tensions between hunters and nonhunters, growing criticism of a department that continues to serve a special interest group and not all its citizens, more contentious legislation and an increase in the calls for other referendums. Sides will be polarized as never before.

The ball is in the DIF&W's court.

*Robert Fisk Jr., of Falmouth, is the president and director of Maine Friends of Animals.*