

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

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

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 728

“AN ACT TO AMEND THE BAG LIMIT FOR TURKEY”

SPONSORED BY: Senator Timberlake of Androscoggin

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator Black of Franklin and
Representative Lyman of Livermore Falls
Representative Wood of Greene
Representative Mason of Lisbon

DATE OF HEARING: April 24, 2023

Good afternoon 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. 728**.

This bill provides that bag limits for wild turkey established by rule by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife must be the same as bag limits for ruffed grouse.

While we appreciate the intent of this bill and the desire to simplify hunting regulations, aligning bag limits for turkey and grouse would potentially threaten the sustainability of our wild turkey population, or significantly reduce hunting opportunities for ruffed grouse, wild turkey, or both species. Although wild turkey and ruffed grouse are game birds, they are distinct species with unique life history traits, management considerations, habitat needs, and social tolerance. The wild turkey has a limited distribution in Maine due to habitat availability and impacts of severe winter conditions that occur in northern, western and eastern Maine. Turkey populations can be impacted by overharvest, particularly when females are harvested in the fall. In contrast, the ruffed grouse has a robust statewide population, with population levels primarily driven by spring and summer weather, which can affect young-of-the-year survival. Unlike with turkeys, hunting mortality has been shown to have very little influence over grouse numbers, even in marginal habitats.

The Department recently went through an extensive planning process to develop wild turkey management, goals and objectives. This process included multiple opportunities for public input, including a scientific survey of public attitudes towards wild turkeys. That effort

identified several wildlife managements districts (WMDs) that were approaching or exceeding social tolerance and in need of population stabilization. To address this issue, in 2019 the Department established a season framework with liberalized fall bag limits in those specific WMDs to stabilize populations through the harvest of females. However, in many northern WMDs the wild turkey population is small and very vulnerable to overharvest.

Currently, total bag limits for wild turkey in the fall range from 1 to 5 turkeys, with several WMDs closed to fall hunting completely. Bag limits for ruffed grouse are set at 4 per day, statewide. If the Department was required to implement this bill, we would have to either increase the bag limit of wild turkey to match those of ruffed grouse, reduce the bag limit of ruffed grouse to match those of wild turkey, close hunting seasons for one or both species in some WMDs, or adjust the bag limits for both species to align them with each other. We suspect that any of these options would be met with significant opposition from ruffed grouse and/or wild turkey hunters.

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