



Maine Professional Guides Association

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Testimony of Don Kleiner Executive Director Supporting LD 5 & 31 RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Exclude Wildlife Issues from Citizen Initiatives RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish the Right To Hunt and Fish

Good morning Senator Mason, Representative Luchini and members of the committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs.

My name is Don Kleiner I live in Union and am here today representing the 1200 members of the Maine Professional Guides Association and I am here today to support LD5 and LD 31.

You have several items on your agenda today that pertain to how the people of our state participate directly with their government and what is off limits in that process. Over my career we have seen referendums on a variety of natural resource issues. The first ballot issues were about forestry and later two on how we hunt bears. These carry a common theme where one small interest group seeks to limit an activity that they see as unacceptable. With little regard for the potential impacts to our economy, heritage, or future.

I think you will agree that hunting and fishing are an important part of the heritage of this state. Indeed they are the bedrock of our identity. That bedrock is most easily observed in the more rural parts of our state. Our fish and wildlife resources belong to all of the people not just the urban majority who consider them less important to their way of life and economic success.

Our constitution is also part of our bedrock playing an important role in making clear the things that we value most. As our population shifts out of the rural regions and concentrates in the more urban places the likelihood of our bedrock heritage being taken away at the ballot box becomes more likely. This amendment seeks to preserve that heritage as an opportunity for every citizen into the future.

North America is unique in the world in that the fish and wildlife resources are held in public trust. Our forbearers had the vision that those resources belonged to all of us and held in trust for the benefit of the entire public. Wildlife is allocated to the public by law, as opposed to market principles, land ownership, or other status. Democratic processes and public input into law-making help ensure access is equitable. Laws regulate access to wildlife and its use unlike almost anywhere else in the world.

An organization of professional guides dedicated to promoting a quality, ethical outdoor experience.

The North American Model recognizes science as a basis for informed management and decision-making processes. This tenet draws from the writings of Aldo Leopold, who in the 1930s called for a wildlife conservation movement facilitated by trained wildlife biologists that made decisions based on facts, professional experience, and commitment to shared underlying principles, rather than strictly interests of hunting, stocking, or culling of predators. Science in wildlife policy includes studies of population dynamics, behavior, habitat, adaptive management, and national surveys of hunting and fishing.

Theodore Roosevelt's idea that open access to hunting would result in many benefits to society. The right to hunt in the United States and Canada by citizens of good standing is in contrast to nations where hunting is restricted to people with wealth, land ownership, or other special privileges. This tenet supports access to firearms and the hunting industry, which is where most funding for conservation comes from as this committee knows better than anyone. Almost all of the funding for Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and wildlife conservation comes not from the non-hunting public but rather hunters and anglers.

In colonial law the right to access our great ponds and the Atlantic Ocean was preserved for the right to fish and fowl. They did not know or think of needing to preserve the right to hunt and fish which is assumed in the access clause above.

I know from experience that there may be better language than you see in front of you today and I urge you to work diligently and carefully to find those words. There are also unintended consequences from any piece of legislation and I ask for your careful thought to what they might be and how best to avoid them. At the end of the day it is critical that we make a concerted effort to keep hunting and fishing as part of the heritage of every citizen in this state.

In the end I urge you to pass some form of amendment to protect the hunters and anglers of this state.