



STATEMENT ON SUNDAY HUNTING IN MAINE

APRIL 2021

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, through education and work on behalf of wild public lands and waters.

One of BHA's main tenets is to maintain and enhance public access and opportunity for hunters and anglers. There are several bills pertaining to Sunday hunting before the Maine Legislature during the 2021 session. BHA recognizes that there are both benefits and possible drawbacks to allowing Sunday hunting. This Statement was developed by BHA's Maine State Leadership Team and is intended to explore the issues related to Sunday hunting in Maine and to provide recommendations for a path forward on this issue. Points from this document have been used to guide our testimony on the Sunday hunting bills.

Sunday hunting would have the following benefits to hunters, DIFW's revenues, and Maine's economy:

- Sunday hunting would provide increased opportunities for working-age adults and junior hunters to become engaged in hunting and conservation. The work and social demands of many adults and youths limit their free time and Sunday may be the only day available to hunt. Children's schedules today are more rigid than in the past, and Sunday hunting would increase the amount of time that junior hunters can spend in the field without interfering with team sports and other school activities, many of which have Saturday schedules.
- Additional opportunities will lead to better recruitment and retention of hunters, which would help reduce the current decline in license sales and would provide significant revenue for the Department. Using data on changes in license sales in states that had eliminated or significantly reduced Sunday hunting restrictions, a 2011 study found that if most Sunday hunting restrictions were eliminated, over 2,500 hunters in Maine would likely have been recruited or retained by 2016, resulting in over \$850,000 in revenue for DIFW.ⁱ
- Increased hunting opportunities would have positive economic impacts on Maine communities as hunters purchase ammunition, hunting supplies, food & fuel, and services provided by guides, lodges, sporting camps and others in the hunting industry. The study *Hunting in Maine: 2013*, which was prepared for the Maine Department of Tourism and DIFW, reported that the average Maine hunter spent \$1,429 in 2013, including \$554 on travel expenses.ⁱⁱ As of 2016 this would have amounted to an increase in hunter spending of over \$3.5 million annually by the 2,500 additional



hunters who would have been recruited or retained over five years if Sunday hunting had been allowed.

- Over the past 30 years 10 states eliminated or loosened restrictions on Sunday hunting. Today there are only eleven states with some restrictions on Sunday hunting, but Maine is one of only two states that do not allow Sunday hunting in any form.ⁱⁱⁱ

BHA recognizes the following concerns exist about Sunday hunting in Maine:

- We are fortunate to have a long firearms deer season allowing for 25 days, of which 7 are Saturdays or holidays. Except for New Hampshire, which has a 25-day season and 10 weekend days and holidays, Maine's regular deer season is significantly longer than that of other New England states. Allowing Sunday hunting during Maine's current four week firearms season would add five weekend days to the current season. This could cause DIFW to issue fewer antlerless permits or recommend a shorter season to compensate for increased harvest on the added Sundays.
- Because the number of days in migratory bird hunting seasons is fixed by federal regulation, adding Sunday hunting would alter Maine's season structure. Notably, the lack of Sunday hunting allows Maine to offer hunting over a longer period of time during the fall migration, thereby providing more opportunity to hunt late-season migrants.
- Maine hunters are fortunate to have a rich history of pursuing game on privately owned lands. With over 90% percent of Maine's forest land and 100% of farmland privately owned, the vast majority of Maine hunters rely on access to private land for hunting. While there is risk that Sunday hunting could result in a reduction in the area of private lands that are open for hunting, we believe that landowner concerns would be addressed by our recommendations below. Any changes in the current trend toward increased posting would be outweighed by the added opportunities that Sunday hunting would provide.
- Recreational users and non-hunters are also likely to testify against Sunday hunting because they prefer one day a week during the regular deer season when there are no guns in the woods. Although the number of hunting accidents has declined significantly since hunter safety programs were required and accidents affecting non-hunters are rare, even one is not acceptable. While the safety discussion usually focuses on firearms season for deer, Maine's Archery & Expanded Archery seasons for deer, Spring & Fall turkey, and small game seasons are less controversial in regard to safety and should be a high priority for Sunday hunting.

BHA's Recommendations for Sunday Hunting in Maine

BHA's Maine members recognize that there are strong opinions about potential changes to the prohibition of Sunday hunting in Maine. We encourage the Legislature to consider ways to provide Sunday hunting opportunities while addressing the concerns of Sunday hunting opponents. Here are just a few ways that Maine could offer Sunday hunting opportunities:

1. **Sunday hunting during archery seasons.** The primary Sunday hunting objection is to firearms hunting during the regular deer season. Pending an analysis of the impact on season lengths and/or antlerless permits, NEBHA would support a change in regulations that would allow archery hunting on Sundays, as is the case in Connecticut.



2. **Hunting on Sundays in the unorganized townships and the White Mountain National Forest.** For many working hunters and hunting families the long drive required to hunt in the Maine Woods is not worth it for a single day of weekend hunting, and weekday hunts may not be an option. Hunting in Maine’s northern timberlands typically occurs far from hiking trails and would not affect farmers, woodlot owners. Because timber operations are generally not active on Sundays, issues with logging road traffic would be minimal. Within the White Mountain National Forest the potential for conflicts between hikers and other recreationists is minimal. Hiking areas are clearly identified and could be easily avoided by hunters, and most hiking trails are not located where hunters are likely to go.
3. **Limit the number of Sunday’s open for hunting.** For example, in 2019 the Pennsylvania General Assembly approved three Sunday hunting days, including one each in the firearms and archery deer seasons and a third to be chosen by the State Game Commission.

As a path forward, we encourage the Legislature and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to explore opportunities for Sunday hunting, and we would be happy to participate in a working group on this issue that includes the Department, landowners, recreationists, and other hunting groups.

The BHA Maine State Leadership Team recognizes that there are strong opinions about Sunday hunting. We welcome further discussion and engagement with our members and the hunting community. If you would like to contact us to engage in further discussions please email us at Maine@backcountryhunters.org.

ⁱ Miller, Brent A. 2011. An evaluation of the potential for Sunday hunting repeals to generate increased funding for state wildlife management agencies. M.S. Thesis, Bard College Center for Environmental Policy.

ⁱⁱ https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/huntinginmaineaine_2013.pdf (accessed Feb 19, 2021)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state/sunday-hunting-restrictions> (accessed Feb 19, 2021)