

Testimony of Tom Doak
Executive Director
Maine Woodland Owners

**In Favor of LD 98 An Act To Eliminate Permits for Wild Turkey Hunting,
Expand the Bag Limits and Expand Opportunities for Registering Wild
Turkeys**

Senator Cyrway, Representative Duchesne and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, I am Tom Doak, Executive Director of the Maine Woodland Owners testifying in favor of the concepts behind LD 98.

The reestablishment of wild turkeys in Maine has succeeded beyond pretty much everyone's expectations. The wild turkeys can now be found in abundance in many areas of the state, including some areas where they apparently never naturally occurred.

Our support of the principles behind this bill are based on the concerns that turkeys are fast on their way of becoming nuisance wildlife in areas of the state.

What started out as a genuine success story to be celebrated – the reestablishment of wild turkeys, has the potential, and in some cases, is turning into “why did we bring these birds back” moments.

Turkey management in Maine is hampered by the fact that we do not have an accurate method of estimating populations. Our sense is the department estimates are low. We do need a scientifically based method of accessing the population.

We should recognize that the reintroduction of turkeys has had an impact in the forest. Turkeys are blamed for many problems: spreading ticks, interfering with ground nesting birds' success, eating food that deer rely on such as acorns, and impacting the regeneration of oak trees - all of which are likely overblown. But they have had an impact and it is important that we move from the population building stage to the management, including additional efforts to control populations where they are high.

Many people have turkey stories to tell. Here is a real life example that you may not have heard about before. Our organization is very much involved in trying to restore the American Chestnut, a fantastic wildlife and timber tree that was largely wiped out in the early 1900's by Chestnut Blight. Through cross breeding the remaining resistant American Chestnut trees with Chinese Chestnut, which naturally have strong blight resistance, we are not very far from having the ability to return American Chestnut to the forest of Maine and elsewhere. In cooperation with the American Chestnut Foundation, we have two significant chestnut seed orchards on lands owned by our organization, which we hope will someday soon be the source of that restoration.

An important step in reestablishing the American Chestnut is field testing different seed sources under natural conditions for vigor of growth, cold tolerance, degree of shade tolerance etc. to determine which seeds will do best in Maine. We attempted two years ago to do one of the first plantings of chestnuts seeds in the wild attempted in Maine. Our efforts failed because turkey populations in the area dug up the entire planted area and ate the chestnuts despite the seeds being placed in protective tubes. This is just one example of the challenges high turkey populations can cause.

This bill is very prescriptive in how to increase hunting opportunities for turkeys in an effort to better control the populations. We are not sure if these are the right ones or not. But we do think the department needs to look for additional ways of increasing the harvest of wild turkeys.