

# ***Report Back***

**On LD 163 - An Act to Increase Communication Between the  
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Lifetime License  
Holders by Requiring Free License Renewals Under Certain  
Circumstances**

**Report to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the 131<sup>st</sup> Joint Standing  
Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife**

**Provided by Inland Fisheries & Wildlife**

Prepared by: Emily MacCabe, Director of Public Information and Education  
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# Directive to Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

## **L.D. 163 - An Act to Increase Communication Between the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Lifetime License Holders by Requiring Free License Renewals Under Certain Circumstances**

This was a department-initiated bill that would require holders of a lifetime license to hunt, trap or fish to notify MDIFW in each year the person intends to use the license by completing a renewal process with the department at no charge. There was an extensive debate amongst the Committee members about how this could best be accomplished and if they could support this, especially if it had a penalty associated with a violation. The Committee decided to carry the bill over and further discuss the proposal during the next session, once MDIFW brought additional information for consideration.

## Background

Lifetime licenses to hunt, trap, or fish have become an extremely popular option in Maine since they were first established in 2000. MDIFW has issued a total of over 100,000 lifetime licenses, and we now sell more than 7,000 lifetime licenses each year. Once purchased, these licenses authorize the holder to participate in the corresponding activity within the state of Maine for the remainder of their life, regardless of residency. Revenue from these licenses is deposited into the Lifetime License Fund (12 M.R.S. §10251), from which the Department can spend no more than 5% annually.

State fish and wildlife agencies require licenses to hunt, trap, and fish for three primary reasons: 1) to measure participation and gauge success in order to effectively manage wildlife populations at sustainable levels; 2) to generate funding for conservation and management programs; and 3) to allow efficient communication with participants in these activities. Although they provide an important and predictable source of revenue for the Department, the popularity of lifetime licenses has led to a slow erosion of our ability to communicate with these license holders and to understand participation rates.

Although contact information is recorded when lifetime licenses are first sold, the quality of this information degrades over time as license holders age, change addresses, or move out of state. This makes it impossible for us to send important information to these users to keep them informed of law changes, safety related updates or solicit their input on proposed management programs. The Department also produces a great deal of educational content for our users that we are currently unable to send to many lifetime license holders because the contact information associated with their license is out of date.

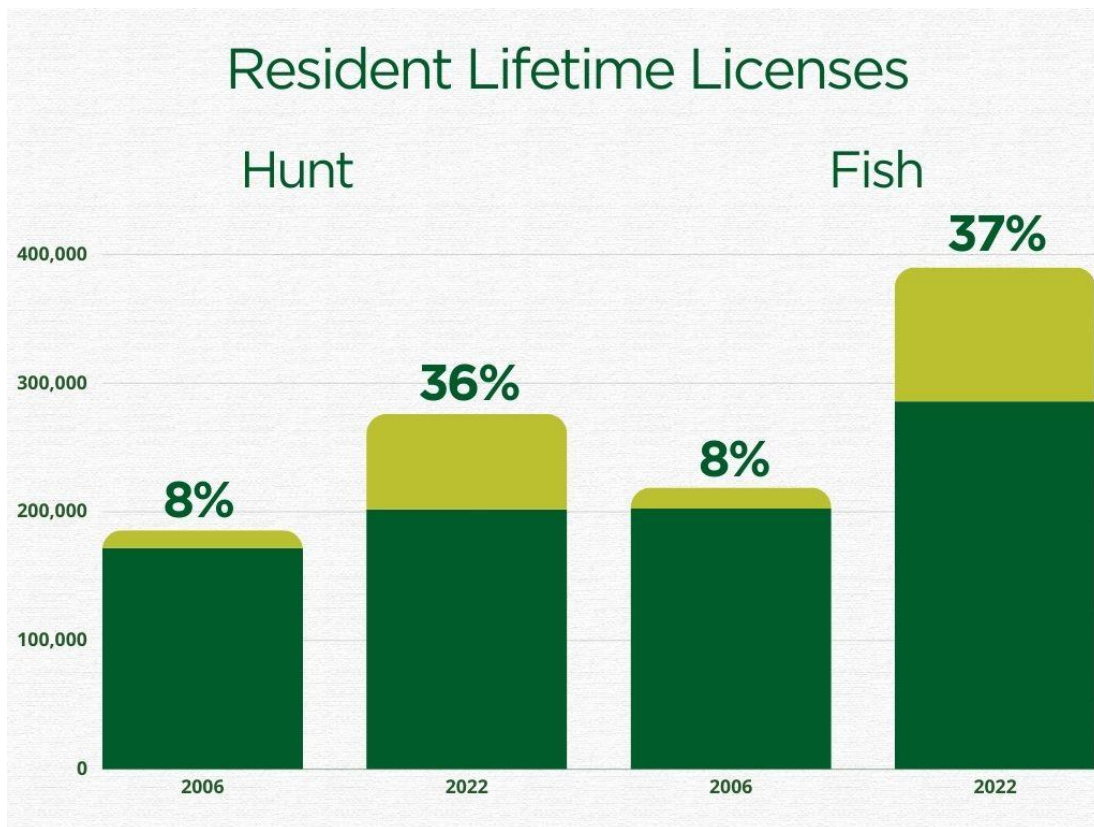
Invalid contact information also presents challenges for law enforcement as they often rely on addresses in MOSES during search and rescue efforts, welfare checks, for fraud license cases, search warrants, hunting violations, license issues, and more. Law enforcement also utilizes phone numbers and email addresses for reaching individuals. Annual renewals and updated information would also allow Game Wardens to better identify lifetime license holders who have become convicted felons and fraudulently obtained hunting licenses and permits.

Perhaps even more important than ensuring the Department can contact license holders, is improving our ability to determine participation rates. Although we suspect that many lifetime license holders are 'inactive' in any particular year, we have no way to formally evaluate this. Therefore, it is currently

impossible for us to determine the true number of hunters, trappers, and anglers that are active participants.

In addition to being critical information to evaluate our recruitment efforts, knowing the number of active users is required to calculate success rates, which is an important metric used to evaluate the management programs for some game species. For example, we currently have no way of accurately estimating deer hunter success rates because we do not know how many lifetime license holders actually hunt each year (and for a significant percentage, we lack current contact information in order to ask them). This negatively impacts our ability to estimate effort and inform management decisions, including determining population trends of some wildlife. Gaining this information will also assist the Department in scientifically surveying a representative sample of hunters to solicit input on management programs, including periodic surveys to estimate harvest levels for species which registration is not required for. Accurate information on freshwater angler participation is needed to equitably allocate available federal funds between the Department of Marine Resources and MDIFW.

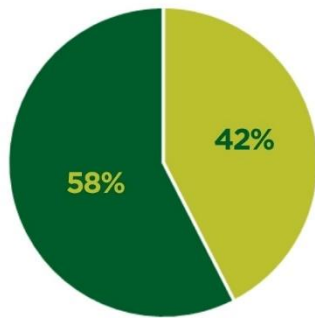
These issues were not discussed or anticipated when lifetime licenses were established over 20 years ago. Additionally, at the time we didn't envision that the need and opportunity for digital communications with our customers would be so prevalent as it is today. This is especially true because there is a such a large volume of lifetime licenses, and they are making up an increasing percentage of our total license sales. In 2022 37% of our total annual licenses were lifetime licenses compared to only 8% in 2006 (Fig. 1).



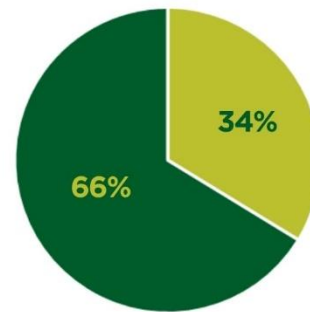
**Figure 1.** Total number of resident hunting and fishing license holders in 2006 and 2022, and in yellow is the percent of those that were lifetime licenses.

There are instances where a lifetime license holder interacts with the Department to purchase additional holdings, such as registering a boat, ATV, or snowmobile, applying for a lottery or purchasing an additional permit to hunt or they may register a harvested animal. That additional interaction does allow the Department to utilize updated information and identify that lifetime license holder as an active user. Unfortunately, those instances capture only 42% of our current lifetime hunting license holders and only 34% of our lifetime fishing license holders (Fig. 2).

Lifetime Hunting Licenses 2021



Lifetime Fishing Licenses 2021



**Figure 2.** Percent of lifetime hunting and fishing license holders in 2021 that interacted with the Department by purchasing additional licenses, permit, or registrations or applying in a lottery (light green), and those that did not (dark green).

Maine is not the only natural resource agency in the country facing this difficult challenge. Many other states have worked to overcome the issue with lifetime license data by requiring an annual renewal process. Vermont, California, Pennsylvania, Idaho and Minnesota currently require lifetime licenses be renewed annually and several other states are working towards implementing a similar requirement.

In Vermont, lifetime licenses can be renewed online or at a local agent. Vermont Fish and Wildlife does not charge a fee to reissue the license, but if the license holder decides to go in-person to a license agent for reprinting, the license agent can charge up to \$1.50 for the reprint. California also allows lifetime licenses to be renewed online or in-person at local agents.

In Idaho, lifetime licenses can be renewed online or in-person at local agents or wildlife offices. The procedure for renewing is almost identical to renewing or purchasing a license except there is no charge. Idaho sends automatic email reminders each year when the license is about to expire. Staff at Idaho Fish and Game reported a high compliance rate with the mandatory renewal process. They indicated that it is rare that a law enforcement officer encounters a lifetime license holder who has not renewed the license, but if it does happen, how the officer proceeds is up to their discretion, but they typically lean on an educational approach and inform the participant of the renewal requirement, how to renew, and the importance of renewing the license.

## Conclusion

To address the issues and concerns presented in this report, we propose that individuals who purchase a lifetime license to hunt, trap, or fish from this point forward be required to renew their lifetime license each year they intend to use the license, at no charge. Additionally, the Department will work to incentivize legacy lifetime license holders to voluntarily participate in the annual renewal process. This would eventually provide us with critical information on the number of these license holders that are active in a particular year. This change would also make it easier for us to make these license holders aware of Department programs, such as contacting anglers to inform them of measures to prevent invasive species, promote the clean, drain, dry campaign, and provide all our user groups with information on laws, rules, and other updates.

The lifetime license holder would renew their lifetime license online, using the same online system as a new license or permit purchase. After entering their name, date of birth, and MOSES ID on the first page of the online renewal service, the system would auto populate the rest of the information to make verifying or updating necessary information as streamlined as possible. The license holder would receive an updated copy of their lifetime license with the year, and the license could be printed, downloaded, or saved to a mobile device. The renewal could also be completed at the same time a hunter purchases a permit, such as a turkey hunting permit.

The Department would remind lifetime license holders annually via email and text notification (if they choose to receive text alerts). At the time of the reminder, the license holder would also be reminded of the many ways updated lifetime licenses benefit them and the State's natural resources.

If a lifetime license holder does not update their license and is requested to present a copy of their license to a law enforcement officer, the law enforcement officer would use the opportunity to educate the lifetime license holder of their responsibility to renew the license annually, how to renew it, and remind them of the many benefits of renewing the lifetime license each year, such as improved search and rescue operations, notifications of critical wildlife management information such as disease prevention, safety reminders, and more.

If the Committee chooses to move this initiative forward, then the Department can provide a report back to the committee in 2026 with an overview of the compliance rates for the required renewal process for new lifetime license holders as well as the voluntary renewal of legacy lifetime license holders.