

This is a printer-friendly version of an article from the Concord Monitor at <http://www.concordmonitor.com>.



Article published Feb 20, 2007

Editorial

Don't sell our moose to the highest bidder

Monitor staff

Feb 20, 2007

Gov. John Lynch's proposal to auction not three moose permits per year, as proposed by lawmakers, but 50 reflects his failure to acknowledge the financial plight of the state's Fish and Game Department.

Like virtually every wildlife agency in the nation, the department's budget has been hurt by declining interest in hook and bullet sports. It needs millions of dollars, but even wildly optimistic projections from a moose-permit auction would net just a few hundred thousand. The scheme is a Band-Aid that will come off in the first rain.

Coveted permits to hunt moose are issued using a lottery system that reserves most permits for New Hampshire residents. The number of permits is dictated largely by the size of the herd, which was estimated at 7,000 last year. According to wildlife biologists, that was enough to issue 675 permits. With an estimated hunter success rate of 75 percent, the program was expected to result in the killing of about 500 moose.

Some New Hampshire residents have entered the lottery for years - in one case since 1988, when the program began - without winning. If 50 moose permits are sold to the highest bidder, the chance of winning will go down for everyone else.

Maine and Vermont auction a handful of moose permits each year, but many bids do not approach the \$5,000 bid proposed for New Hampshire. The take would not be what the governor, or the bill's sponsors, project.

People who pay big bucks expect special treatment, and they'd get it under the proposed system. Now, hunters who win a permit and pay the additional fees are assigned a hunting zone. Moose abound in some zones - the Colebrook area is particularly good - and are scarce in southern zones.

Auction winners, however, would get their pick of hunting territory. That would drop the odds of bagging a moose for hunters who can't afford to pay what the market will bear for a permit. They would get a less desirable hunting territory. Money, not prowess, experience, marksmanship and time in the woods and luck, could determine a hunter's success.

Fish and game are a public resource. Access to that resource, which nets the state many millions per year in rooms and meals taxes, continues to shrink. Development eats up more land, and more is posted each year. In many parts of the country, public access is shrinking because landowners are leasing the rights to hunt and fish on their property to those willing to pay for exclusive access.

In 2003, a report for the state of Washington's wildlife agency asked hunters and landowners what a fair price would be to hunt for a day on private property. Hunters said they would be willing to pay \$6 to \$10 per day to pursue deer. On average, landowners said \$136 per day was a fair price.

A \$5,000-minimum bid auction for 50 moose permits would encourage that "what the market will bear" mentality. It is a turn away from open and equal access to the state's wildlife resources and toward exclusivity. It is not the answer to Fish and Game's revenue problems. And in the long run it's going to harm, not help, the agency and the sport.

----- End of article

Monitor editorial

This article is: 0 days old.