

# The Maine Campaign to Defend Bear Hunting and Trapping

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## Maine's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council

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### The Initiative

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has circulated petitions for a citizen's initiative that would ban hunting of bear with bait and dogs and bear trapping. The initiative question is expected to be on the state referendum ballot in November of 2004.

HSUS claims to have collected 100,000 signatures – mostly on the November 4 election day – in favor of their initiative to ban bear hunting with bait and dogs and bear trapping. Given that the turnout on November 4 set a record (due largely to the hotly contested casinos ballot measure), their accomplishment is not surprising. We received many reports from voting places that HSUS petitioners were poorly informed about the initiative, and were misleading signers.

To help put their petition success in perspective, the pro-casino initiative also collected 100,000 signatures in 2002 for their 2003 initiative, which subsequently was defeated by a 2 to 1 margin. It's also important to note that the pro-casino side spent over \$10 million on their losing campaign! The winning campaign cost about \$2.5 million.

### The Sportsmen's Campaign

The Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM) is leading the campaign to defend Maine's bear hunt, in partnership with the Maine Professional Guides Association and the Maine Trappers Association. A broad coalition of sportsmen's groups, businesses, other associations and individuals is being organized to participate in the campaign. We are also receiving support from national sportsmen's groups, including Safari Club International and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance.

The sportsmen's campaign is being conducted under the umbrella of a new political action committee called Maine's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council. Campaign information and news may be found on SAM's website: [http://www.samcef.org/bear\\_referendum\\_information.htm](http://www.samcef.org/bear_referendum_information.htm).

### Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is the most aggressive and best-funded national anti-hunting anti-trapping organization, with an annual budget in excess of \$65 million. It has been successful in a number of similar referenda in other states, including Washington, Oregon, Colorado, and Massachusetts. This is the group's first effort at initiating a referendum vote in Maine.

## **Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM)**

The Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM) is the state's only full-time sportsmen's organization with a headquarters and staff in the state capitol of Augusta and 14,000 members spread throughout the New England states and beyond. More information about SAM may be obtained at the organization's website ([samcef.org](http://samcef.org)).

## **Governor Baldacci**

Governor John Baldacci opposes the referendum. This is what the governor has said:

“Groups, funded by out of state organizations committed to ending hunting, are backing a referendum that would make it illegal to hunt bear with dogs, to hunt bears with bait or to trap bears. They believe they know better than the State's biologists and animal management professionals how Maine should manage our wildlife resources. They have gotten out early to tell their story to Maine voters. We need to tell our story.

“Here are the facts. The Department's biologists have been studying Maine's bear population for more than two decades, a research project unequaled by any other state in the country. We know that the bear population is increasing in Maine. These scientists know best how to care for and manage the bear population, and a limited hunting season for bear is one of those tools. Bear hunting has allowed us to control the growth of the bear population so the population pressure doesn't force bears into areas with high human populations. I oppose the referendum in part because it would take away the tools these scientists need to do their jobs as resource managers.

“IFW and I are opposed to this referendum for an additional reason. The loss of these forms of bear hunting will economically impact not only the department, but also hundreds of guides and businesses throughout Maine that cater to all types of hunters from August through December. Many of these people and businesses are located in parts of the state where there isn't as much economic activity as we would like to see. The jobs provided by bear hunting are important to the communities in these areas, and we need to do what we can to preserve them.”

## **Maine's Inland Fish and Wildlife Department (IFW)**

Governor Baldacci has pledged that his Fish and Wildlife Department will do everything possible to defeat the HSUS initiative. The governor has authorized department leaders and staff to attend campaign events, appear in campaign advertisements, and present objective science-based information to the citizens of the state on bear management, hunting, and trapping issues. IFW staff is specifically authorized to “respond to correct misinformation and misrepresentation of the facts by any person or organization on any side of the referendum.”

## **The Maine Campaign**

This campaign will be an air war. We have studied HSUS campaigns in other states and are well prepared for their barrage of inaccurate emotional television advertisements. We intend to spend at least \$750,000 on television ads, and are setting aside \$3 of every \$4 raised and dedicating that money to the television campaign. And we will be prepared to spend more. Our total budget is \$1 million, but we hope to raise at least \$1.5 million to assure victory.

Phase One of our campaign, through the end of December 2003, was focused on building our coalition and raising the early funds that are so important in getting the campaign off to a quick start. We have also conducted our first benchmark poll, by Dr. Christian Potholm of South Harpswell, Maine. Dr. Potholm is a nationally experienced pollster and widely regarded as the best pollster and political strategist in the state of Maine. The campaign was kicked off at an organizational meeting in early September attended by over 100 outdoor leaders from throughout the state. We are in the process of building the strongest grass roots political campaign team ever assembled in the state, and have received an outstanding response to our call to arms from sportsmen throughout the state.

Campaign headquarters is located at SAM's Augusta office (see contact information above). SAM's Executive Director, George Smith, is directing the campaign with help from SAM's Office Manager Kelly Cochara, and our newly hired professional campaign staff.

### **Fundraising - \$1.5 Million Goal**

As of December 17, our campaign had raised a total of \$177,482 and had \$109,712 on hand, with no major payables. With the arrival of recent major donations and the continuing daily returns from the hunter household mailing, we'll easily surpass \$220,000 in contributions by the end of this month. That's \$70,000 more than our year-end goal of \$150,000! We believe this fundraising success is an excellent start, given that HSUS only began collecting signatures in September and the measure will not be on the ballot until November of 2004.

An early \$10,000 donation from US Sportsman's Alliance (USSA) helped get the campaign off to a fast start, and the organization's follow-up donation of \$30,000 in December will put us over the top of our year-end fundraising goals. Equally important, USSA pledged another \$40,000 contribution in 2004.

The Maine Professional Guides Association stunned the audience at SAM's ninth annual Sportsman's Congress with a pledge to raise \$100,000 for the campaign. The pledge includes \$20,000 that MPGA donated last June to pay for the campaign's initial benchmark poll by Command Research and Dr. Christian Potholm.

Also at the Congress, participants learned that the Presque Isle Fish and Game Club is moving forward to meet its pledge of \$10,000. Sportsmen throughout Aroostook County are working on a dinner event scheduled for April 16 in Presque Isle, with a goal of raising another \$10,000 for the campaign.

From Downeast Maine comes word that the Grand Lake Stream Guides Association is forwarding a very generous donation of \$5,000, and had pledged to help its neighboring club, the Princeton Rod and Gun Club, to match that donation.

The campaign requires everyone's support. But we can attain our ambitious goal.

## Message for Sportsmen

Hunting with bait is the most common and traditional method of hunting all game in Maine – whether you are sitting in a wetland filled with rice waiting for ducks, watching an apple tree waiting for a deer, or placing bait near your stand hoping to get a bear. We spray scents and lures. It's all bait. Even anglers use bait for fishing. An attack on bear baiting is an attack on all hunting – and fishing. IFW's briefing paper agrees: "In almost all forms of hunting, hunters select sites with natural foods, and use lures, scents, decoys, and manual and electronic calls to attract their quarry. Aspects of all of these techniques are inherent in all hunting and have been a part of hunting since its beginnings."

Hunting with dogs is also a great Maine tradition – whether you're chasing rabbits with a beagle, grouse or woodcock with a setter, or bear with a hound. An attack on hunting bear with hounds is an attack on all hunting with dogs. Let's all understand what they're coming after. They're coming after every one of us, and everything we enjoy about hunting and trapping and fishing in Maine today. Spread the message!

## Message for the Public

"The end of the bait hunt in Maine is the end of bear management in Maine." Those are the words of DIF&W wildlife biologist and bear expert Randy Cross, in an April 23, 2003 Bangor Daily News report. About 80 percent of the bears harvested in Maine each fall are taken over bait. In Maine's thick forest canopy, free range hunting of bear is ineffective.

A June 11, 2003 briefing paper by IFW's bear experts reports, "The loss of traditional bear hunting methods will cause the black bear population to increase, with a consequent increase in nuisance complaints. Increased human-bear encounters will require expensive relocation or lethal control of bears. The Department's animal damage control budget has been eliminated as part of the recent budget balancing measures; therefore, new sources of funds would need to be identified."

### Here is our simple message:

We can't harvest bears in sufficient numbers in Maine to keep populations in check, without using bait. Bears will be in your backyard, if you vote yes on this initiative.

Bears will threaten your family – your kids – your grandchildren – if this initiative is enacted.

Black bears are dangerous. They are aggressive in some circumstances. They do kill people. This past spring, in nearby Quebec, a forester marking trees for Fraser Paper Company was killed by a black bear.

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**For more information and updates on the campaign, visit these websites:**

Sportsman's Alliance of Maine – [http://www.samcef.org/bear\\_referendum\\_information.htm](http://www.samcef.org/bear_referendum_information.htm)

This report and other updates may be viewed online, or a printable copy downloaded from, the Maine Professional Guides Association website – <http://www.maineguides.org/referendum/>