

The Sportsmen's Alliance of Maine annual SAM Congress wasn't open to the public. It was by invitation only to Maine's outdoors movers and shakers. Some SAM members expressed concern about the exclusivity of the Congress to me prior to the event, but it did keep out anti-hunting, trapping and anti-SAM groups.

SAM Executive Director George Smith emceed the Congress and kept the focus on issues that might unite or divide sportsmen. In doing so, he hoped sportsmen would find middle ground on divisive issues rather than continue on a polarized path.

Many legislators that serve on the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee attended. Other politicians made their presence known as they have thrown their hats into the gubernatorial race.

I spoke with Rep. Stan Moody who endorses the use of crossbows for deer and bear hunting. "They can be used in areas where a gun hunter might be uncomfortable discharging a firearm because of noise. For example, if you are hunting 100 yards in the woods, gunfire might scare a kid waiting for the school bus, even though shooting is perfectly safe." Moody stopped short of offering a new bill to expand their usage. "Neither bow hunters nor gun hunters wanted them in their season." Moody said. That statement surprised me, as I've never heard gun hunters complain about the introduction of crossbows, but I wasn't at the crossbow hearings. And SAM deer task force member Gerry Levigne opined, "crossbow usage is exactly where they ought to be"

Governor John Baldacci chatted with attendees who waited in line for the buffet lunch. He didn't mention his re-election campaign, said he loves farms, and that the state is in better shape now, than when he took office. And he supports sportsmen. The day included many panel presentations, but the audience didn't have the opportunity to ask questions.

Here are a few quotes from the Congress:

"Tax incentives and Eco-terrorism laws will help maintain open access to Maine forest land."

"The Tree Growth tax law is the single most important tool for habitat protection in central and southern Maine."

"Landowners are frustrated! Users need to realize somebody owns all land. 50% of landowners report misuse of their property. Maine needs an effective Landowners Relations program." **Tom Doak, Small Woodland Owners Association of ME**

"Maine receives 25-million dollars in taxes on farmland. Farmland must be taxed on 'best usage' rather than development potential."

"Most farmland is open to hunting but Maine farmers oppose Sunday hunting."

"Many farmers oppose the introduction of Wild Turkeys to Aroostock County."

**John Olsen, Me. Farm Bureau**

"We operate out in the open, not in a box. We have contacted the farmer in southern Aroostock and addressed his concerns about the introduction of turkeys."

"The person assigned to Landowner Relations spends 10% of their time on this issue. **DIFW Commissioner Danny Martin**

“No other state agency is as dependent on private landowners allowing public access, as is our department.” **DIFW Deputy Commissioner Paul Jacques**

“Landowners get little recognition and pay for abuses. Maine needs a full time person to deal with Landowner Relations.”

“Maine needs incentives to discourage illegal dumping of trash and appliances, similar to the returnable bottle bill.”

“Usage of the NMW is decreasing and electronic rather than manned gates may be in the future.” **Al Cowperthwaite, North Maine Woods**

“We maintain 440 public boat launches. There are lawyers who’ve found a niche market representing those who want to deny public access to Maine lakes, rivers, and coastal areas.”

“2-million people used state parks in 2005.”

“Plum Creek is the largest development program under LURC jurisdiction, and we have wind power projects in our future.”

“Maine forests are in the best shape they’ve been in for over 50-years.” **Patrick McGowen, Department Of Conservation**

“Hatcheries have been upgraded. Production of more and larger brook, brown and rainbow trout are in the future for 06.”

“We will manage smelt conservatively.”

“There is a consolidation of regulations on Brook Trout, and we are considering more kids fishing opportunities.”

“Maine has 600 lakes and ponds containing wild brook trout. They must be preserved.” **John Boland, Director Fisheries Division**

“A southern Maine moose hunt will be conducted during the regular firearms season on deer.”

“The state of New York had an outbreak of Chronic Wasting disease, which it has under control. But CWD has cropped up in West Virginia.”

“We have concerns about winter-feeding of deer in Maine, which could lead to a CWD outbreak because of deer consolidation.”

“Cooperation between large landowners and deer biologists regarding deer wintering areas is at an all time low!”

“The new spring wild turkey season will be divided as A and B seasons. Even number birthdays get A season. Next year, odd number birthdays get A season.” **Mark Stadler, Director Wildlife Division**

“A grant has paid for a laptop program for Wardens. Each will get a laptop which will save time filing weekly reports.”

“An major area of concern; Wardens have reduced patrols to conserve fuel.”

**Major Greg Sanborn, Warden Service**

“Atlantic salmon returns have increased for the last 6-years in the Penobscot River.

We will establish a 4 week catch and release season below the dam.” **Trout Unlimited**

“We will control 426,000 acres in which to balance growth and conservation efforts.”

“We want to guarantee public access.”

“Greenville wants economic growth plus a future.” **Plum Creek**

“The Coalition to Preserve and Grow Northern Maine is an alternative voice for Mainers. You should join us if you want to help promote growth, forestry, tourism, hunting, fishing, and snow-mobiling while increasing prosperity in northern Maine.”

**Edith Smith Leary**

“Funding for DIFW and the DOC remains an ongoing issue.”

“2-years without the coyote snaring program has had a negative impact on deer in northern Maine and Washington County.” **George Smith, SAM Executive Director**

“I am bothered by the willingness of some sporting groups to give away something (a sport) that they aren’t interested in. Once you give it away, it’s gone forever! That’s the tactic of the anti-hunting, anti- trapping groups; To take away your sports one item at a time until it’s all gone!” **Skip Trask, Maine Trappers and Professional Guides representative**

The big issue for the MBA is to expand MBA membership. **Don Kleiner, representing the Maine Bowhunters Assoc.**

“Access is a major issue in central and southern Maine. We must sell the image of hunters as game managers in these areas.”

“Coyotes and lack of deer yard habitat protection have hurt northern Maine deer populations.

“Are Canada Inx truly endangered? I don’t think so, I think they are thriving. Lynx depend on snowshoe hare as their main source of diet, not deer. And there are plenty of snowshoe hare. The Anti-hunting/ trapping crowd is using the endangered species act and the lynx as a tool to try to get the US Fish & Wildlife service to designate 1/3 of Maine as critical habitat for the Lynx. That will end logging, road-building, snow-mobiling, and hunting within a 10,000 square mile area, while promoting the idea of a Northwoods National Park!”

“Deer hunters aren’t achieving management goals because antler-less deer permit holders pass on doe deer, hoping for a buck. One way to change that it to reduce the number of permits allocated, while allowing permit holders 2-deer, an buck and a doe.”

**Gerry Levigne, former DIFW deer biologist and member of SAM’s deer task force**

That’s plenty to discuss while stoking the wood-stove this winter, don’t you think?

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