

**Statement of Tim Peabody, Associate Professor of Conservation Law, Unity College
January 28, 2010**

**On Release of National Wildlife Federation report:
Oddball Winter Weather: Global warming's Wake-Up Call for the Northern United States**

My name is Tim Peabody, Associate Professor of Conservation Law at Unity College, and retired chief of the Maine Warden Service. New Years Day in Maine marks the statewide opening of the annual ice fishing season for many outdoor enthusiasts. This year opening day headlines of the great season ahead were overshadowed by thin ice warnings by the Maine Warden Service, and a number of tragic events associated with unsafe conditions on our lakes and ponds.

Maine inland waters have always had varied ice thickness even in the coldest winters. This year with a late freeze and recent rains, ice conditions are even more unpredictable. With the potential of more erratic weather patterns associated with global climate change, as outlined in the recent National Wildlife Federation report, emergency responders in Maine will likely be facing more calls for search and rescue, further straining department budgets.

The economics of global climate change were also cited in the National Wildlife Federation report. State fish and wildlife agencies across the country rely on revenues from the sale of fishing licenses, and snowmobile registrations. Any change in weather patterns that disrupts public interest in these popular winter sports can dramatically affect important conservation programs.

The State of Maine is fortunate to have 13,500 miles of groomed snowmobile trails supported by registration fees, and cadre of volunteer clubs, providing an economic engine that many communities in the State rely upon. Snowmobile registrations have fluctuated over the years but growth patterns have always been associated with consistent snowfall that provides for a long winter season. Shortened winter seasons, and decreased snowfall can lead to poor and dangerous trail conditions, decreasing interest in a fun family sport.

Inconsistent weather patterns can also affect Maine's wildlife. Whitetail deer rely on winter cover and a readily available food source to survive a traditional Maine winter. Several years of decreased snowfall can cause deer to not seek proper cover during the winter months. Such a pattern followed by inconsistent heavy snow storms can trap deer in areas of inadequate cover and feed causing high levels of winter mortality.

This is just a snapshot of some the potential affects from changing global weather patterns. Supporting initiatives for clean alternative energy, and comprehensive legislation at the state and federal level is a necessity.