

Testimony in Favor of LD 814 An Act to Restrict the Daytime and Nighttime Killing of Coyotes — Erin Filson

Sources: *Coyote America* by Dan Flores; projectcoyote.org

Before European contact, coyotes were a lesser predator living in the Southwest. Their population was naturally controlled by competition with apex predators. However, when a hole appears in an ecosystem, nature will fill it. Europeans decimated populations of apex predators, such as bears, wolves, and cougars, allowing for the expansion of this very resourceful minor predator. Coyotes spread across the country as Europeans spread across the country, filling in the gaps of the ecosystems that were destroyed in their wake. We should know from this very history that killing off the next tier of wild predators will not in fact solve any problems. It will simply create another hole that nature will be forced to fill. We cannot keep killing our way through every intricate ecosystem.

However, that has been our tactic for decades. The United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services estimates that 500,000 coyotes are killed each year. This carnage costs US taxpayers roughly \$100 million annually. I don't know about you, but I would like to see my money going elsewhere. Not only because I believe in the importance of coyotes but because mass culling does not work!

This tactic has not worked for multiple reasons but mainly because coyotes are clever. They create complex social groups and change the composition of these groups depending on resources present within their territory. In a healthy social group in an established territory with plentiful resources, only the alpha male and alpha female will mate and reproduce. Coyotes determine territory and conduct a census by singing to see how many coyotes live within the area. With that information, the alpha couple decides if, when, and also how many pups they will birth and raise.

This is because coyotes do not want to overpopulate! Although resourceful, they do not want to compete with each other for food or shelter. If a coyote's song is not answered by other coyotes, she will stay, call others to her to mate, and form a pack. If a coyote determines there are enough coyotes within an established territory and therefore, too much competition, she will move on. Therefore, allowing coyotes to live, to have their pups, to establish families and territories, will actually be the greatest natural deterrent to more coyotes. They will respect each others boundaries. They will control their litter and pack sizes. A broken social order, due to the death of a member, creates more single coyotes looking to breed and build their own packs. They invite more outsiders into their territory and coyote populations increase.

Also, allowing both coyote parents to raise their pups will create a safe and stable environment where the coyotes will be able to teach their young to hunt natural prey. This does not include livestock! Coyotes do not want to interact with humans or dogs. They do not want to risk their own lives for a meal. They do this out of desperation

when stressed, hunted, and afraid. Just like how we reach for the Doritos or McDonalds when we are at our most anxious.

Believe it or not, coyotes benefit humans! A healthy coyote population will naturally control other wildlife populations. Farmers and ranchers benefit from coyotes eating animals which are known to destroy crops and grazing pastures, such as mice, rats, rabbits, and groundhogs. Also, by consuming rodents, coyotes save us from diseases carried by vermin. Coyotes force herds of deer to continue moving so that they do not stay in one place and strip crops. Studies show that the presence of coyotes has a positive impact on the diversity and abundance of ground-nesting birds and songbirds because they create competition for mesocarnivores, such as skunks, raccoons, foxes, and feral cats.

In summation, coyotes are alive and deserve to live. They are intelligent and resourceful creatures who play an important role in the Maine ecosystem. They are able to make smart decisions for their own families and it would be wise for us to respect them and learn to use non-lethal tactics. If for no other reason than that the widespread murder of this species has not and does not work. With LD 814, we are simply asking to restrict the mass culling of coyotes for a few months so that the animals are able to establish these self-controlled packs, raise their young, and teach them how to hunt the correct prey, thus lessening any potential interaction with humans and livestock in the future.

“Many fail to take into account the collateral ecological damage of such practices (lethal wildlife management), and by removing one form of predator, many unintended consequences pertaining to plant life and the emergence of other pests and predators are likely to result.” (Government’s Approach To Coyote Population Management <https://faunalytics.org/us-or-them/#>)

Thank you for your time.