

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Re: In Support of LD #814 "An Act To Restrict the Daytime and Nighttime Killing of Coyotes"

April 3rd, 2023

Good afternoon, Sen. LaFountain, Rep. Landry and members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife;

My name is Gina Garey; I am a professional animal behaviorist at Animal Behavior and Healing in Portland and the Maine State Director for Animal Wellness Action and Center for a Humane Economy.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 814, (An Act to Restrict the Daytime and Nighttime Killing of Coyote.)

As a professional behaviorist for canid species, I took great interest in the recent fur bearer species planning process by DIFW. I attended the public session offered to observe and comment on the outcome of the process, and decisions on incorporating subcommittee recommendations for future planning for coyote in Maine.

We are here today following a decision to set aside a consensus of wildlife biologists to establish a closed season for coyote that was based on their expertise and the wealth of information they brought to bear to the planning process. Indeed, these biologists were selected and appointed for their expertise, only to hear that their recommendations would not necessarily be a part of the departments' planning, and should be resolved by the legislature. So here we are.

These biologists understand the important role coyote play in our landscape through the predator prey relationship. Their recommendation to establish a closed season for raising pups is based on understanding the inherent sensitivity of the species to the disruption of their close family relationships and territorial lifestyle patterns. If one parent is killed, it sends the family into a chaotic state, often resulting in increased predation on young farm animals that would not otherwise occur.

Their contribution as drivers of biodiversity have been widely studied and are well known. We know that the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National created a resurgence of

biodiversity. Native trees returned that vanished from overgrazing, elk populations stabilized, and many species returned including songbirds.

The biologists bringing their case to you today understand that carnivores, like coyote, keep wildlife numbers in balance and help prevent diseases such as wasting disease in deer and rabies in foxes and raccoon. Since their main diet consists of rodents, their presence also reduces the spread of Lyme disease, the bacterium for which is carried by wild rodents.

Coyotes are, in fact, THE keystone carnivore, and as such, we are fortunate to have them in our landscape. It is crucially important to the continued health and biodiversity of Maine's ecosystem that coyote be granted respite from current policy, one that essentially constitutes wanton waste of wildlife through daytime hunting, by any means, 365 days a year.

You will hear today that this legislation is about ending hunting, and that year-round killing of coyote is needed to protect deer in their wintering areas. Clearly that is not the case. The record harvest of deer in 2022 will disavow you of that narrative.

This is an effort to successfully maintain the health of the population during their breeding season, as exists for other game & fur bearer species: deer, bear, moose, bobcat, red fox, skunk, raccoon.

This bill is long overdue, based on best practices and established science and crafted by those who understand the importance of preserving our keystone carnivore, the coyote. Please support them with the vigor this measure deserves, with a vote of "ought to pass". The full legislature deserves to hear the facts and to vote on LD 814.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Gina Garey, MS CABAC Animal Behavior and Healing
Maine State Director- Animal Wellness Action & The Center for a Humane Economy

End note: (The absence of coyote has been documented to result in increased human wildlife conflict, a decrease in nesting success of ducks, declines in pheasant and grouse and a decrease in the diversity of songbirds. Farmers also understand their presence reduces crop devastation by herbivores such as deer, noting that when the coyote show up, there is less damage and loss to their crops.)

