

Richard Bard
East Machias
LD 814

Good afternoon members of the committee. My name is Richard Bard and I live in East Machias. I spent about 11 years as a wildlife biologist with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife based in Jonesboro and I am pleased to testify in support of LD 814. This is a bill that offers common-sense reforms to coyote hunting that will benefit the people and wildlife of Maine.

Coyotes have the most liberal hunting provisions of any species in the state. Only woodchuck, porcupine, and red squirrel may also be hunted year-round but coyotes also have the additional pressure of 8 and ½ months of night hunting. Why is this? I believe this is an outdated holdover from the days when coyotes were new to the State of Maine and hunters were afraid that coyotes would decimate the deer population. In fact, I found an article by Jerome B. Robinson from IF&W's own department magazine, called Maine Fish and Wildlife, published in 1979. It states, in part, "And there is a natural fear that the coyote may, in taking his rightful share of wild meat, leave less than enough for the man with the gun...Men will hunt coyotes relentlessly and believe that in doing so they are saving deer. Game managers, aware of the strong sentiment of those who oppose predators, will leave the coyote to fend for himself without benefits of closed seasons or bag limits... Eventually hunters in the Northeast will come to realize that the coyote, with all his intelligence and craftiness, is a challenge to hunt, a game animal in his own right."

Are we there yet? Can we evolve from the mindset of "the only good coyote is a dead coyote" to seeing them as part of our landscape and managing them like every other game or fur-bearing species in the state? We know very well that we are not going to extirpate coyotes and that coyotes are not going to extirpate deer and other game animals, so I won't dwell on the overall impact this change would have on wildlife populations.

The core feature of this bill is to provide a closed season while coyote families raise their young. Science has shown again and again, in coyotes and wolves, that family units that are broken up by the loss of one or more adults during pup-rearing are much more likely to depredate on livestock or otherwise become a nuisance. This only makes sense when you consider that a single coyote raising a pack of young pups will be driven to pursue the easiest and most available prey which may often be sheep, chickens, or even calves rather than wild game. And what lesson does this teach the pups who are learning life lessons from their parents during that critical time of life? The cycle continues as these depredating coyotes teach their young to target farm animals leading to generations of dysfunctional coyote packs.

On the other hand, stable packs that rely on natural prey are assets to farmers as they help control rodents and other agricultural pests. There are many farmers who have known generations of coyotes living alongside their flocks or herds.

And make no mistake. This bill does nothing to limit the ability of anyone in the state to kill a coyote that is causing property damage. This bill will not lead to a crash in deer populations. This bill will not lead to a significant increase in livestock or pet depredation. This bill will not impact public safety. And this bill will not cost the government money to implement.

What this bill will do is provide a means for coyotes to raise their young naturally. It will also bring our management of coyote populations a step closer to modern, humane wildlife management practices enjoyed by every other species in the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.