



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 3760  
Portland, ME 04104  
Phone: (207) 761-5616  
[www.sierraclub.org/maine](http://www.sierraclub.org/maine)

To: Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife  
From: Ashley Nye, Sierra Club Maine Volunteer  
Date: March 3, 2025  
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 716: An Act to Restrict the Hunting of Coyotes**

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife,

I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members and supporters nation-wide.

When wolves were hunted nearly to extinction in the United States, coyotes found room to thrive on the edges of our civilizations. This adaptability and boldness is what has made them a poster child for American wildlife/urban conflict, right up there with raccoons, rats, and seagulls. Despite their habit of digging through dumpsters and stalking neighborhood cats, these animals are still quite shy, making human conflict rare. **Coyotes play a vital role within both suburban and remote ecosystems.** They are top chain carnivores, and their diet varies widely from prey as large as deer, down to rodents and other small mammals. They are essential in regulating the spread of disease, managing foliage eating herbivores, and have even been linked to keeping bird populations healthy by reducing the rodents and foxes, which prey on eggs. This role is quite similar to wolves, which are federally protected in many states. Is our issue with coyotes that we simply see them as "less wild?"

Maine coyotes are a mix between eastern coyotes from the upper peninsula of Michigan, which bred with red wolves during their slow migration into Maine, replacing the niche of the hunted-out gray wolf. While the percentage of wolf DNA is very diluted among the population, Maine coyotes have evolved to be morphologically quite distinct from their midwestern ancestors. Some are even reported to sport the characteristic golden eyes of their cousins. Unsurprisingly, like the gray wolf, coyotes were (and are) not welcomed by the state, whose economy is largely based on vacation dollars from rugged outdoorsmen - including hunters. Today, coyote hunting is year round, and coyotes are seen as off-season "target practice" for hunters. In the northern counties of the state, coyote killing tournaments are held with unlimited quota. These contests are labeled as a method of wildlife management, despite research showing it has little to no effect in boosting the deer population. In fact, ticks have been a lethal factor contributing to the state's declining

moose populations; a parasite carried by mice and other rodents whose populations are kept in check by predation by coyotes.

During my time at the University of Utah, I had the opportunity to participate in the Sekercioglu research lab. Specifically, I assisted with the study of the Wildland Urban Interface of the Wasatch front, and how local coyotes were adapting to the city's sprawl. The lab was also part of a larger, nationwide study on the behavior of urban coyotes, investigating whether city-dwelling canids were more willing to enter "human structures" for a chance at food than their remote neighbors. Through their research using camera traps, they also found that **coyotes are found to be more abundant in areas where they are routinely hunted**, which is highly counterintuitive to the Fish and Wildlife's approach of nearly unregulated culling of the species.

Coyotes have slid rather seamlessly into their new role in our forests. Coyotes in general are much more comfortable in proximity to humans, and better at remaining in our shadows. Though they engage in occasional predation on small livestock (nothing like the cattle-battle out west), there have been precious few conflicts since their arrival. Aside from the unfounded claims that they are a detriment to deer populations, they don't present much of an issue for Mainers. The violently aggressive response of the Fish and Wildlife Department has been based on science that is outdated and now in conflict with recent research, as well as social and cultural characterizations of the species. This is hardly a valid justification for unregulated hunting and mass killing events. **Not only should Maine's coyote hybrids be let alone to fill their ecological role, they should be protected as a diverging species**, a rare glimpse into the logic of nature.

Responsible hunting can be an effective wildlife management tool, and increase human connection to the natural world. Hunters are a vital connection between conservationists and the public, and are oftentimes the first to sound the alarm when something is off in an ecosystem. However, in the case of Maine coyotes, the dominant rhetoric in the deer and predator-hunting community is deeply misguided at best, and devastatingly cruel at its worst. Famously shown in the case of Yellowstone National Park, canids are essential on the American landscape to maintain balance. Even the most diligent of hunters cannot replicate the role canids play in their environment.

Wolves have been missing from our New England forests for nearly a century or more. The coyote hybrids were not stocked, nor are they invasive. As the niche became available, these populations migrated on their own, following the path of least resistance. While the extinction of the Maine gray wolf was anything but natural, the wolf's replacement by the hybrids is everything that is - it is evolution in action. The goal of conservation in all its existence has largely been to preserve ecosystems in the primitive state they were found.

The unfortunate reality however, is that **humans are changing the landscape more rapidly than nature can keep up with.**

Humans hunted out the wolves. Humans created an atmosphere that is rapidly warming and changing, and lending itself to extreme weather events that push wildlife away from their habitual residences. Humans build the cities and towns that sprawl unchecked into their critical habitat. Coyotes are one species that has managed, despite all odds, to adapt to this erratic and dominating behavior. Wolves have not, so far. Who are we to decide which species should thrive and where? Who are we, in addition to creating a hostile world, to also demand that it remain unchanged? It is one thing to fight tirelessly for a park, reserve, or species to be let alone and undeveloped. It is entirely another to eradicate a naturally occurring species, to overwrite adaptation, and replace it with another we deem as “more worthy” of protection.

I have been impressed with Maine’s progressive environmental policies. The banning of offshore drilling, the commitment to reduce our carbon emissions by 45% by 2030, and the variety of parks and preserves available to explore despite the lack of public lands, are all examples of accomplishments even wealthier, bluer states have not managed. **It is critical to Maine’s mission to foster health for its residents, to ensure longevity in the ecosystems that support both industry and recreation in the state.** Our environmental legislation must be founded upon science, and our policies regarding species must be well researched and *earned*. Mindless, **unregulated slaughter of wild canids is not within the ethics held by Maine constituents**, and is entirely counterproductive to the goals of said methods. Coyotes are not a threat to our forests, nor do they play a primary role in complicating agriculture.

As we work to balance responsible hunting with ongoing protection of Maine’s treasured natural resources, we encourage the committee to support L.D. 716.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Nye  
Sierra Club Maine Volunteer