

TESTIMONY OF Dr. Tammy Cloutier

In SUPPORT of LD 1293 “An Act to Prohibit Coyote-Killing Contests in Maine”

Committee of Inland Fisheries Wildlife

April 2, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Tammy Cloutier, and I reside in Kennebunk. I’ve studied canids in Africa and the US and am currently studying Maine’s foxes and coyotes.

It has been said that coyote killing contests are a necessary wildlife management tool. However, even the legislative mandated coyote impact on deer report in 1995 (LD 793) included the statement that “committing state funds and effort toward habitat conservation would, in the long-run, be far more cost-effective than engaging in widespread coyote killing campaigns.”

The unsubstantiated claim that coyote killing contests are needed aside, the mass removal of coyotes impairs the importance of their ecological value: a value recognized by MDIFW, the agency charged with managing wildlife for all Mainers.

Both predators and prey are vital to healthy ecosystems, ecosystems that support fluctuating predator and prey populations. We do not fully recognize or understand the complexity of these relationships despite some stating it is a black and white issue: that killing more coyotes will automatically increase the deer population.

It has been thought that predators such as coyotes impact ecosystems by altering prey populations through predation or maintaining territories that keep other predators out. However, they are also involved in the creation of what some have called “ecological hotspots.” For example,

- Killing large prey provides food for coyotes, but the carcasses also feed a variety of other wildlife. In addition, nutrients are absorbed by the soil and nearby plants as carcasses decompose.
- Coyotes transport prey remains to other locations, such as dens. Nutrients from prey remains and coyote excrement accumulate, with the build-up of nutrients possibly creating ecological changes in localized areas.
- Coyotes can prevent prey from radically altering habitats, such as what happens when there is an overpopulation of herbivores (e.g., deer) that decimate vegetation, impacting the natural forested beauty that is loved by many Mainers.
- Coyotes can potentially decrease diseases that can spread to domestic animals, as well as decrease wildlife-vehicular collisions.

Despite humans thinking we can easily mimic the roles predators play (that of a hunter), we

cannot because we lack the understanding of the intricacies of our ecosystems and the role each species plays. Indiscriminately and unnecessarily killing as many individuals as possible during coyote killing contests may provide a short-term solution to what some label as a problem, but it does nothing to benefit Maine's natural resources in the long-term.

Lastly, because coyotes have been inexplicably exempted from Maine's Wanton Waste Law, coyote killing contests allow participants to intentionally injure or kill coyotes and leave them to suffer and die anywhere.

Previous Maine coyote research was supported in part by Pittman-Robertson Act funding and MDIFW. We would be wise to invest in research to better understand Maine's predator/prey relationships rather than allowing the outdated practice of coyote killing contests to continue.

Thank you for your time.