

TESTIMONY OF MICHELLE LUTE, PH.D.

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In SUPPORT of LD 1293 "An Act to Prohibit Coyote-killing Contests in Maine"

Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

April 2, 2025

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Committee,

My name is Michelle Lute. I am the Executive Director of Wildlife for All speaking to you on behalf of our Maine supporters. I am a conservation scientist and a lifelong advocate for ethical and science-based wildlife management. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today in strong support of LD 1293.

As a PhD wildlife scientist and former state biologist where killing contests were banned without negative repercussions, I state confidently: wildlife killing contests offer no management benefits whatsoever. Using killing contests as a management tool is akin to bloodletting as medicine. Biologists now know that trying to manage wildlife like cash crops is harmful to ecosystems. Contests beget chaos with unregulated killing of predators that do not need such control. Carnivores self-regulate and have done so based on compensatory mechanisms, competitors, and native prey availability for millennia.

As both a scientist and the daughter of four generations of farmers in the Great Lakes region, I can also state confidently: killing contests do nothing to address conflict because they do not target the offending individual, site where depredation occurred, or time when it occurred. If anything, they serve to increase conflict by disrupting social structures and foraging ecology. Contests can increase the number of transient individuals and take out parents before they teach their young to properly hunt. Native carnivores take few livestock—less than half a percent, according to the USDA. The best available science points to nonlethal methods to prevent conflict. They are effective, targeted, and address the root causes of conflicts.

Additionally, no credible evidence exists to support the notion that indiscriminate killing of predators effectively helps manage their prey species. Coyote diets are omnivorous and rely on rodents and rabbits more than deer. Rodent control is just one of the many ecosystem benefits of predators.

As a scientist whose dissertation focused on carnivore management, I can state again confidently that killing contests are not supported by the vast majority of Americans, including hunters. My work also revealed broad support for:

-Proactive, nonlethal solutions

- The intrinsic value of carnivores, and
- The benefits they bring to ecosystem health and function.

You don't need to read my research to know that Mainers value their wildlife alive and hunting when it puts food on the table—not when it is done purely for money and petty prizes.

You may have heard concerns about the “slippery slope”—that is actually a logical fallacy where an action is rejected because, without evidence, one insists it will lead to a chain reaction resulting in an undesirable end. The only slippery slope that ending killing contests leads us to is further refined policies supported by science and Maine's values. I would venture we all agree that's a desirable end.

Maine has an opportunity to join a growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington—that have already banned these cruel and ineffective contests. This legislation aligns with Maine's commitment to responsible, science-based wildlife policy that balances the needs of people and ecosystems.

Most Mainers cherish their wildlife and do not support killing for prizes. Public opinion consistently favors ethical hunting and opposes contests that commercialize and trivialize the taking of life. Passage of LD 1293 would uphold Maine's values of conservation and responsible stewardship of its natural resources.

I urge you to support LD 1293 and put an end to this outdated and senseless practice. Killing contests disrespect Maine's natural legacy. Please support this commonsense resolution opposing killing contests.

Thank you for your time and consideration.