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Testimony in Opposition

LD 814, An Act to Restrict the Daytime and Nighttime Killing of Coyotes

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Presented by David Trahan, Executive Director of the SAM-Institute for Legislative Action

Monday, April 3, 2023

Senator LaFontaine, Representative Landry, members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee my name is David Trahan and I am testifying in opposition to LD 814, *An Act to Restrict the Daytime and Nighttime Killing of Coyotes*. Maine has a 51-year legacy of year-round coyote hunting.

Proponents of LD 814 want us to believe that coyote hunting, during the pup-rearing period, is inhumane. They ignore the reality that nature is raw and brutal whether man is involved or not. Survival of the entire litter is rare among coyotes even where humans are absent.

Coyotes are not capable of self-awareness; that is a human trait. Hence, they cannot perceive “persecution”. Coyotes react to their environment instinctively. Their own actions should not be considered intentionally cruel when they take a deer down by ripping apart a hindquarter and feeding while the hapless deer bleeds out. Nor should we assign a cruelty motive when a coyote pounces on a newborn fawn in hiding, crushing the fawn’s head and neck with its powerful jaws. A coyote will do what a coyote will do.

Simply put: Nature can appear cruel at times. And it will remain that way with or without people in the mix. We should not allow emotional arguments to dictate wildlife management decisions.

Legislative intent is, and has been, to use hunting to address negative impacts of coyotes on wildlife, livestock, and pets. Coyote hunting was never intended to be sport hunting, like our partridge or hare seasons. It is coyote damage control using hunters as the control agents. As in Maine, 45 other states currently allow year-round hunting of coyotes for the same reasons.

Political animal rights activists and their friendly biologists, like those behind this bill, attempt to gain support for protecting coyotes by creating the image of coyotes as gentle creatures, exploiting the modern public disconnect with the realities of the natural world.

The real agenda behind LD 814 is to fully protect coyotes in Maine, allowing this “Song Dog” to increase to its own biological carrying capacity. And when coyotes come into conflict with people, well then people must simply adapt and live with the consequences. This extremist anti-human agenda was directly communicated to DIFW by two coyote protection advocates who served on the coyote planning committee in 2021 and 2022.

Few Mainers agree with this extreme pro-coyote philosophy. Based on recent (2020) public input, over 70% of the public in Maine support management of coyotes (DIFW Furbearer Plan).

LD 814 is the wrong policy for Maine. It reverses long-standing legislative intent to reduce the damaging effects of coyotes. The loss of coyote hunting from April through September ensures that coyotes cannot be managed for the public good. Hunters will see less deer hunting opportunity. DIFW will be hampered in its efforts mitigate the negative impacts of a growing coyote population. The average homeowner and farmers will be dealing with more conflicts with coyotes. And Maine’s hunting economy will experience a net loss. Finally, DIFW’s new program to restore deer in northern Maine through purchase and management of DWAs would be jeopardized by their inability to manage coyote predation.

Please Oppose LD 814.

Fact Sheet

Hunter participation is strong and growing:

- Hunters overwhelmingly (87%) support predation management (2020 DIFW Coyote Plan)
- At least 40% of SAM’s 7,000 members hunt coyotes using one method or another (SAM member surveys).
- DIFW annually issues 7,000 to nearly 10,000 night-hunting permits for coyotes (2020 DIFW Coyote Plan).

Coyotes’ impact on deer hunting

- Coyotes and hunters compete for available deer. More coyotes mean lower deer harvests.
- DIFW has had to reduce antlerless deer harvests to compensate for coyote kills of adult deer and newborn fawns.
- Since 1986, antlerless deer harvests have been reduced by thousands statewide. In the northern 2/3 of Maine, doe hunting has been practically non-existent.
- Lower harvests mean less economic activity from deer hunting.
- Thousands of deer never make it to our family tables.

Cascading negative consequences of LD 814

1. Reverses the Legislative mandate to control coyotes and replaces it with an ineffective sport hunting season.
2. Reduces hunting opportunity by 60% and bans coyote hunting when it has the greatest impact on coyote populations.
3. Coyote survival will improve, and their population will increase statewide.
4. Newborn fawn survival will decrease, more adults will be lost during winter, both leading to declining deer numbers and harvests statewide.
5. DIFW’s new program to restore deer in northern Maine through purchase and management of DWAs would be jeopardized by their inability to manage coyote predation.
6. Coyote depredations on livestock, and companion animals will increase.
7. DIFW will need to divert more staff resources to accommodate increased complaints from the public.
8. Lower deer harvests will lead to further losses in rural Maine’s deer hunting economy.