

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of **LD 716 An Act to Restrict the Hunting of Coyotes**.

My name is Dr. Tammy Cloutier. I am a Maine resident who studies animal behavior and human-wildlife interactions.

Like opossums, coyotes naturally expanded their range to include Maine, and their numbers began to increase in the 1970s. Coyotes were labeled as furbearers in 1971, followed almost immediately by an open season to kill them, and then many legislative actions that resulted in being able to kill them year-round, day and night via hunting, trapping, snaring, and baiting. This practice has continued for over 50 years.

Some individuals want Mainers to believe that a regulated hunting season for coyotes will result in us being overrun with aggressive packs of large coyotes who will eat all our deer, kill our livestock, and attack our family pets. I respect that everyone is entitled to an opinion, but there is no evidence to support these claims and wildlife management is supposed to be based on science, not fear mongering to benefit a minority interest.

A quick look at the history of coyote management and coyote research in Maine shows that over 50 legislative actions relating to killing coyotes have been submitted from 1972 - 2023. Compare that with the approximately 20 articles published on Maine coyote research conducted primarily between 1974 and 1992. This comparison highlights that while some continue to push the constant killing of coyotes as the only means of managing them, much of the research we have on Maine coyotes was done over 30 years ago on a few individual coyotes and family groups (captive and wild) in limited areas. In my experience, captive animals do not always behave the same as their wild counterparts, and one group of animals does not necessarily represent all groups. So if the argument is that Maine's current coyote management is based on science, it seems to be based on a relatively small sample of coyotes from 30 or so years ago. That is not "sound science."

I don't know about you, but I don't look and act the same as I did 30 years ago. My assumption is that Maine's coyotes don't either, yet we have continued the same management practice for 50 years without learning more about them. Coyotes are here to stay, and even MDIFW's blog states that coyotes are "extremely intelligent and highly adaptable with a fascinating history and unique position in Maine's ecosystem." How do we know that a regulated hunting season for this "extremely intelligent" species isn't a valid and viable alternative? We don't. Because we've never tried anything other than the year-round killing of them.

It's human nature to dislike or fear change, but change is inevitable and it is past time to try a new approach to coyote management in Maine. This bill is not unreasonable or unattainable. Instead, it brings coyote management in line with what is currently being done for other Maine wildlife. I ask that you vote LD 716 OUGHT TO PASS and thank you all for your time.

For over 50 years, Maine's eastern coyotes have been vilified simply for sharing Maine's landscape. Despite coyote predation on wild and domestic animal populations and threats to humans not being an issue in Maine, no other species faces this level of year-round persecution based on assumptions, fear, and ignorance. It's difficult to accept that this management is based on science given that the limited science conducted on coyotes primarily occurred in the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s. Even the legislative mandated coyote impact on deer report in 1995 (LD 793) did not introduce "new" science. Instead, it was a synthesis of existing information taken from other sources and regions at that time. One purpose of the study was "to propose recommendations to encourage the harvest of coyotes," but the report 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."**



Coyote performing the "mouse pounce" while hunting rodents. Image courtesy of Jennifer Molitor (<https://wild-within.com/about/>)

## The following excerpt is from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife blog.

[Not to Fear, Predators are Here](#) (November 5, 2024)

### What's in a Name?

Even with such a wide range of predators on the landscape, and substantial knowledge of the irreplaceable role of ALL predators in ecological health, **a few of Maine's predators are still burdened with a tarnished reputation. With coyote and fisher taking much of the heat, it's time to move past the myths, stick to the science, and gain understanding to move from needless fear to healthy respect.**

Have you ever thought about where negative perceptions of some species come from? It's human nature to fear what we don't understand, to find comfort in familiarity, and to value what we view as directly relevant to our day-to-day lives. It's easy to underestimate the value of one piece of the puzzle until we understand how it fits into the whole picture. Consider too, that **a poor perception of one species may be the direct result of subjective placement of higher value on a preferred species. Personal preferences for certain species, often those perceived as underdogs, don't change the fact that healthy ecosystems are driven by interactions between diverse and equally vital species.** Predator and prey are simply two sides of the same coin.

**Coyotes are extremely intelligent and highly adaptable with a fascinating history and unique position in Maine's ecosystem.**

The first myth you may have heard about coyotes is that they are invasive or were intentionally or unintentionally introduced to Maine. It's true that coyotes did not occur in Maine historically, but they were not introduced. **Coyotes are considered a naturalized species that expanded their range through natural dispersal, just like Virginia opossums.** Unlike invasive species, **most naturalized species, including coyotes, do not have a net negative impact on the environment.**

Coyotes gradually spread northeast on their own four feet following significant habitat shifts and extirpation of wolves in the 1800s. Through unmatched adaptability, coyotes made a permanent home for themselves in our state as one of our top predators. They can live just about anywhere from suburban parks to remote wilderness. They were first documented here in the 1930s, became well established by the 1970s, and are here to stay.

Lastly, like fisher, coyotes are often thought of as a dangerous animal that prowls around and poses a threat to people and pets. **Coyote attacks on people are exceedingly rare and are usually associated with a coyote that has been fed and habituated.** Learning to recognize normal versus abnormal coyote behavior and taking steps to remove common attractants from one's yard are two ways that Mainers can live more comfortably with coyote neighbors.



Both male and female coyotes share the responsibility of caring for and raising their pups. Image taken from the MDIFW blog [Not to Fear, Predators are Here](#) (November 5, 2024)



Coyotes playing. Image courtesy of Shutterstock: Royalty free image

## **Questions to consider as to why there is not already a designated coyote hunting season:**

- What is the goal of the current coyote management effort? How are the goals and/or objectives measured, and who measures them?
- Not all coyotes who are killed have to be registered, so how does IFW know how many are killed annually and where they are being killed?
- It is difficult to accurately count wildlife, but it is estimated that there are about 12,000 coyotes in Maine. Given the size of our state (~ 33,000 square miles, including waterways and land), and that coyotes set up territories, there can only be so many resident coyotes at any one time, so is there really a threat of being overrun with coyotes?
- Predators and prey are naturally regulated by food and habitat resources, and indiscriminate killing can have additional ecological and welfare ramifications that we are not aware of, so shouldn't we be studying interactions between coyotes and other species rather than simply killing them?
- Are Mainers aware of the free ecological services that coyotes offer to humans? This includes help with rodent control, controlling disease transmission by reducing the spread of rodent-based zoonotic diseases, and keeping the environment "clean" through scavenging (much like buzzards/vultures do).
- The 2020-2030 Maine Furbearer plan notes "there is a need to provide Maine citizens with more information about this important mammal and adaptable predator, including how to more effectively coexist, and to [increase] public tolerance for coyotes." Is allowing the year-round killing of coyotes truly an effective way to show Mainers how to coexist with, or increase their tolerance of, coyotes?

## **Responses to common opposing arguments for creating a regulated coyote hunting season.**

**Not based on sound scientific principles because deer are struggling to survive in northern Maine.**

If the habitat and resources are not available to support deer (or any other species), the deer population will not stay or survive in that area regardless of how many coyotes are killed or artificial/supplemental food sources are provided. In addition, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife states that a “common concern is that coyotes are reducing Maine’s white-tailed deer population and hunting opportunities. It is true that coyotes are efficient predators and can influence white-tailed deer population dynamics, particularly when deer are restricted by deep snow. However, **nature is far too complex to assume that coyote predation always reduces the deer population.** In areas where deer are not limited by habitat and winter severity, predation does not limit yearly population growth. **In fact, over the last decade, Maine’s deer population has steadily increased.** It’s also important to remember that in addition to being skillful hunters, coyotes are opportunistic scavengers. **Many deer consumed by coyotes died by other means, such as malnutrition and motor vehicle collisions.”**

**The deer population would be higher in Maine if it wasn’t for coyotes because coyotes eat adults and fawns.**

Coyotes are not the only predators of young and adult deer, yet are blamed as if they are. Bear, bobcats, and fishers also prey on deer, and don’t forget the number of deer-vehicle collisions that occur every year (there were approximately 6,600 in 2022 alone).

**The northern Maine coyote population will increase because coyotes disperse northward, but the coyote population shouldn't be allowed to increase in the state at all.**

Based on Dan Harrison's 1986 Maine coyote research, coyotes disperse in multiple directions, not just north. Coyotes from eastern Maine traveled to New Brunswick, New Hampshire, and Vermont. In addition to high pup mortality, dispersing coyotes face many obstacles (e.g., vehicles, humans, physical barriers such as waterways), so not every coyote who leaves their home range to find their own territory will survive. Also, coyotes are territorial, so allowing a family group to maintain their territory prevents other coyotes from moving in. If resident coyote families are constantly disrupted through killing, it creates a space for more coyotes to come in.

**A regulated coyote hunting season would affect New England Cottontail recovery.**

Yes, coyotes are omnivores and eat a range of food items from fruit and insects to deer.

However, according to MDIFW's website, habitat, not coyotes, is the primary challenge facing New England Cottontails: "New England Cottontail are known to occur in just 6 towns: Cape Elizabeth, Scarborough, Wells, York, Kittery, and Eliot; with a statewide population of less than 300 individuals. **The range-wide decline of NEC has been attributed to habitat loss, particularly the loss of old field, shrubland, and young forest habitats. These habitat types provide dense cover that protect the rabbits from avian and terrestrial predators. These habitats were once relatively common in southern Maine, but now makes up less than 3% of the landscape.**"

**This type of bill eliminates the ability of IFW to use lawful hunting of coyotes as a management tool.**

Laws to allow the killing of coyotes for sport, not necessarily wildlife management purposes, have been enacted since 1971. IFW's use of lawful hunting as a tool is still an option.

**IFW follows the principles of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.**

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation has its origins in the 1800s and stresses science as the foundation of wildlife management. It includes 7 principles, 3 of which are:

- “wildlife is a public resource” (meaning wildlife is meant to be managed for ALL Mainers for long-term sustainability, not just those who hunt, trap, or fish)
- “wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose” (i.e., a legitimate purpose does not mean that this is the way it has always been done so we should continue to do it)
- “science is the proper tool for discharge of wildlife policy” (decisions must be based on sound science)

**This bill is the first step to eliminating hunting.**

Mainers will never approve the elimination of hunting, and that is not the intention of this bill.

This bill is meant to create a regulated season for coyotes as has been done for many other wild species in Maine.

**Why are constituents having the Maine Legislature propose these types of bills?**

Sporting groups have been doing this for over 50 years. Other constituents are now asking their elected officials to represent their interests as well.



**The following images have been used to grab attention and/or for shock value. Nobody wants to see an animal suffer, but unfortunately, this is also part of the predator-prey relationship.**



The image above previously contained a description referring to how this buck was being eaten alive. Coyotes do not own firearms, archery equipment, or traps. They have to rely on their claws, teeth, and intelligence to catch their prey. It is not easy, and it may look gruesome to humans, but they are obtaining their food in the only way they know how in order to survive. We also do not know the context behind this picture. This buck may have been wounded by a vehicle, injured after falling through ice, or even shot by a hunter prior to the coyotes finding him. Despite the graphic and sad nature of this image, this one deer could potentially feed these 3 coyotes for days or weeks.



The image above was previously described as a “coyote in an urban/suburban setting carrying a freshly killed fawn.” The fawn may have been “freshly killed” (although there is a lack of blood), but is there evidence that this coyote killed the fawn or could the fawn have been stillborn, killed by a vehicle, left by another predator, etc.?



The photo above was described as having been “taken by a trail camera after the deer breeding season and the doe is likely to be pregnant with twin fawns.”

Yes this coyote is chasing a deer, and yes the deer could be pregnant. However, the success rate of an individual coyote taking down a healthy deer is unknown. Deer are also not defenseless. There are videos of deer lashing out at or standing their ground against a coyote and the coyote moving on.