

Testimony on L.D. 716, An Act to Restrict Hunting of Coyotes

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Maine State Legislature. I am a full time Maine resident, residing half the year at Moosehead Lake, where I infrequently see but often hear coyotes and the other half in Brunswick, where I've occasionally heard coyotes.

It is high time Maine joins the ranks of the enlightened States which responsibly manage predators and their prey, and have moved on from previous draconian predator control, including for coyotes.

Coyotes have been misunderstood and much maligned here in Maine and throughout North America for centuries. Here are the facts.

- Coyotes are incredibly effective in killing rodents, including field mice and rats, many of which carry tick-borne diseases such as Lyme disease, now spreading north throughout the State.
- As climate change continues to impact Maine, other tick-borne diseases are being documented, including babesiosis, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, hard tick relapsing fever, and Powassan encephalitis (NY State Dept. Health; Maine Medical Center). Coyotes can play critical positive roles in eliminating these disease-carrying tick vectors by consuming the rodents that carry them. LD 716 helps move us, and coyotes, in that positive direction.
- I remember Defenders of Wildlife's Wyoming Field Representative, Dick Randall, who before joining Defenders was a USDA Wildlife Services government trapper. As part of his job, Dick would perform necropsies to examine the stomach contents of the coyotes he killed. They invariably had stomachs full of rodent pests and little else. Recognizing the importance of coyotes in controlling rodents, and the wrong-headed thinking that led to their mass killing, Dick ultimately left Wildlife Services and joined Defenders.
- With sufficient wild prey available, and responsible livestock-rearing being practiced, coyotes show little interest in killing livestock. Their presence can actually positively impact livestock behavior by keeping sheep and cattle on the move within their pastures, the woods, and other grazing areas — reducing cattle and sheep overgrazing, and resultant soil damage and erosion.

- Coyotes, by their very presence, can also move deer out of corn, wheat and other forage vegetation, helping farmers increase their crop yields and profit margins — deer damage is a significant issue here in Maine. By hazing deer, coyotes can keep the white-tail deer, which are vectors of the brain/meningeal worm, away from hooved livestock, reducing parasite transmission.
- By their hazing behavior, coyotes also move deer and moose, helping to reduce ungulate over-browsing, benefitting both foresters and young seedlings. Ground-nesting songbirds also benefit as seedlings and low shrubbery are less impacted, which is becoming a significant issue where white-tailed deer are overpopulated.
- With the loss of apex predators like the timber wolf and eastern mountain lion, coyotes have now assumed that predatory role. However, by continuing to remove coyotes, their role continues to be reduced or eliminated, further knocking our ecosystems out of balance.
- For some landowners here in Maine, stable populations of coyotes can result in a “guarding” phenomenon, where a stable coyote family will not allow other coyotes into their territory. This can ultimately lead to a relationship of trust between the farmer and his/her coyotes benefitting the farmer, his/her livestock, crops and range.
- Ecotourism could also benefit as people love to hear and see coyotes; I certainly do.

The current situation:

What we currently have is a draconian situation where coyotes, including their pups, can be killed year round, day or night — chased by hunting dogs, baited, shot, clubbed, even burned to death in their dens. As the former Boone and Crockett Club Big Game Records Coordinator, documenting the Club’s “Fair Chase” policy for the submission of wildlife trophies, I submit that such current control activities blatantly violate Boone and Crockett’s principles of fair chase regarding the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful way of hunting wild game. Hopefully passage of LD 716 will begin to get Maine headed in the right direction of managing our coyotes — which as a public trust, belong to all Maine residents — in a far more reasonable and scientifically sound manner.

While I support the current bill language, having worked on wolf control issues in Alaska for more than a dozen years, fines for violations need to be significantly increased if stopping violations are to be taken seriously by perpetrators. Nonetheless, I strongly recommend that L.D. 716 ought to pass.

Respectively submitted, -Dr. Albert Manville-