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LD 716

I am a science educator, a Maine Master Naturalist, Maine Guide and Master Gardener. I have worked in the field with renowned University of Oregon biologist Cristina Eisenberg, studying the role of carnivores in ecosystems. My professional - and personal - experience compels me to share why we need a healthy Coyote population in Maine ecosystems.

The current laws regarding killing coyotes are counterproductive from the biological, ecological, practical, and human perspectives.

The coyote plays a critical role in what we think of as the balance of nature. It is a keystone species. Like a keystone in Roman architecture, when a keystone species is removed from an ecosystem it falls apart. When coyotes are killed indiscriminately throughout the year and particularly during the breeding and pup rearing season, we are doing far more harm than good. Coyotes under stress produce more offspring. Their social structures are damaged leaving more of what we humans consider "problem" coyotes. Picture it like a drive by shooting that kills several family members and leaves traumatized humans left to cope and fend for themselves.

Every member of a natural community has a role in keeping the land healthy and functioning, including humans. Coyote's unique role as a keystone species sets off a whole cascade of direct and indirect events that ripple through the trophic levels of an ecosystem. Intact healthy Coyote populations are able to do their job - maintaining ecosystem balance.

They help maintain biodiversity. The presence of coyotes keeps herbivores such as deer on the move so they do less damage to plants that other species depend upon; this protects habitat that is critical to songbirds, butterflies, other insects, pollinators and many other species. It also keeps deer from lingering where they would devour crops and spread disease to livestock, such as brainworm.

Coyotes keep populations of rodents and other small mammals in balance through predation; they also help weed out weak or sick deer. Contrary to popular mythology healthy deer are not often prey to coyotes, nor are farm animals. Healthy coyotes stay in their lane and won't be motivated to go after livestock if they are able to thrive in the wild.

We have been laboring under a mistaken assumption that has decimated carnivores since the birth of this nation - that carnivores serve no purpose, are harmful and must be eliminated. Mountains of research confirm that a healthy population of carnivores is beneficial and necessary to ecosystem health. It is time to correct our behavior to match our understanding of how nature works. The year round harassment and killing of coyotes is counterproductive, but if we allow for healthy coyote social structures, we all benefit. That's why I urge you to pass LD 716 and let the Coyote do its job on our land, offering its free services as a keystone carnivore.