

**WRITTEN SUPPLEMENTAL TESTIMONY OF PAUL R. CAMPING
REPRESENTING**

THE AROOSTOOK COUNTY CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

In Opposition to LD-814

**An Act to Restrict the Daytime and Nighttime Killing of Coyotes
Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries
& Wildlife**

March 24, 2023

Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, greetings. My name is Paul R. Camping and I reside in Caribou, Maine. I am on the Board of Directors of the Aroostook County Conservation Association (A.C.C.A.), hereinafter referred to as the Association, and I am submitting the following written testimony on its behalf in steadfast opposition to LD-814.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Association was founded 15 years ago in an effort to help the decimated White-tail Deer population make a recovery from an all-time low which was the direct result of harsh winter weather and predation from Black Bears and Coyotes. Our conservation strategy involves 3 critical programs; habitat improvement, supplemental winter feeding and predator management. We strongly encourage our members to hunt and trap coyotes and bears.

Our **Coyote Control Management Program** is not an attempt to eliminate or eradicate all coyotes from the County. It is an effort to suppress their population and bring into balance the predator-prey relationship that exists between deer and coyotes which is, and has been for some time, disproportionately in favor of the coyotes. The program begins in October with the trapping season and ends in

Mid-March. It is an organized effort to remove as many coyotes as possible ***during the fall-winter period of time in which the deer population is the most vulnerable*** and to interrupt the breeding season of bonded coyote pairs. Our goal is to reduce the number of potential litters that would otherwise exist if there was no hunting pressure.



The above photo depicts a white-tail buck being attacked by 3 hungry coyotes who are eating it alive during the breeding season for deer.

Our program is not a “*killing contest*” and there is no “*prize money*” awarded. Participants who do harvest a coyote are reimbursed for their time and expenses at the modest rate of \$25.00 for each coyote tagged. We are pleased to report that we removed 150 coyotes during the most recent operation of this program costing the Association \$3,750.00. This is a small amount of money when compared to the

actual expenses incurred by hunters and trappers for the cost of their bait, license fees, firearms and ammunition, traps, trail cameras, batteries and gasoline!

THE REASONS FOR OUR OPPOSITION

LD-814 is not based on sound scientific principles and there is no factual or rational basis to justify its passage. Rather, it appears to be nothing more than an *emotional solution searching for a problem*. Scientific studies have conclusively shown that Coyotes do not need protection from hunting at any time during the year. Wildlife Biologists universally agree that coyotes are one of the most adaptable omnivores that walk the earth and can thrive in most every environment found in North America.

It is important to note that even though our program ended in March, many hunters are still hunting coyotes to keep the pressure on them during the deer fawning season and throughout the summer. In northern Maine, deer population dynamics are influenced by many factors. Chief among them is the fact that suitable winter habitat has been severely compromised and winter weather has been long-lasting and harsh. When these conditions exist, deer struggle to survive and predation by coyotes has been, and continues to be, a limiting factor.

*"Coyote pups emerge from the den in two to three weeks and begin to eat regurgitated food. Conflicts between humans and coyotes may occur at this time because the **need for food increases dramatically.**"* (MDIFW website). The Association has a supplemental feeding program which is intended to keep deer strong, healthy, and more resistant to predation. We know that deer fecundity (birth rate) and fawn recruitment into the herd could be much higher in Maine if it were not for coyote predation which happens throughout the year.

"A recent MDIFW study to determine cause-specific mortality for wintering deer suggests that more deer mortalities are directly attributed to coyotes in the northern Maine study sites (WMDs 1, 5 and 6) vs. the central Maine study site (WMD 17), most of which occurred when there was deep snowpack (MDIFW unpublished data). This suggests coyote predation is not a significant source of mortality

in central and southern Maine; but in northern Maine where habitat is compromised and winters are more severe, it can sometimes be a significant source.” (MDIFW 2020 -2030 Furbearer Management Plan).



The photo above depicts a coyote in an urban/suburban setting carrying a freshly killed fawn.



The photo above depicts a coyote in a wooded setting with a freshly killed fawn.



This photo was taken by a trail camera after the deer breeding season and the doe is likely to be pregnant with twin fawns.

When a pregnant doe is chased and killed by a coyote, the herd has likely lost 3 deer, not just 1!

LD-814 takes a one size fits all approach to limiting coyote hunting. The MDIFW mortality study cited above illustrates that coyote predation already has a limiting effect on deer in northern Maine. Allowing coyote populations to increase would be devastating to the deer in Aroostook County, while southern and central Maine would also see a significant increase in deer mortality. Even if the text of the

bill was rewritten to exclude northern Maine, it is very likely that the Aroostook coyote population would eventually increase as well due to coyotes dispersing northward. *“Dispersal is the movement an animal makes from its birth place to where it reproduces, and is the primary mechanism by which animals find and inhabit new areas and avoid inbreeding (Caughley and Sinclair 1994). It is also a time of high mortality as animals move through unfamiliar territory. Maine’s coyotes begin dispersing at about five months of age, in late September (Harrison 1992b). Dispersal peaks during October and November and again in February and March. In Harrison’s study, 86% of the pups dispersed during their first year, with 53%, 33%, and 14% of the juvenile coyotes emigrating during autumn, late winter, and after the first winter, respectively. All pups in this study dispersed by the time they reached 1.5 years of age.”* (MDIFW 2020 -2030 Furbearer Management Plan).

Allowing the population of coyotes to increase anywhere in the state is simply a very bad idea!

LD-814 is poorly written and technically deficient in that it causes direct conflicts with other statutes in Title 12 M.R.S.A.

The Bill states, in pertinent part, “A person may not hunt, chase, pursue or kill a coyote by any means..... from April 1st to September 30th”. The conflicts are as follows:

- **§12401. Attacking domestic animals or destroying property**

Except as provided in sections 12402 and 12404, a person may lawfully kill, or cause to be killed, any wild animal or wild turkey, night or day, found in the act of attacking, worrying or wounding that person's domestic animals or domestic birds or destroying that person's property. A person who kills a wild animal or wild turkey by authority of this section shall report the incident to the Maine Warden Service as provided in section 12402, subsections 3 and 4. [PL 2003, c. 414, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 2003, c. 614, §9 (AFF).]

- **§12404. "Specific animals. 4. Coyotes.** The commissioner may cause department personnel to take coyotes at any time and in any manner that the commissioner may prescribe."

[PL 2003, c. 414, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 2003, c. 614, §9 (AFF).]

LD-814 impedes the population recovery of the threatened New England Cottontail rabbit. The coyote diet includes virtually everything that lives in Maine, from voles to Moose Calves. If they can catch it and kill it, they eat it! The New England Cottontail is no exception. This bill is making a mockery of the IF&W's Furbearer Management Plan by completely ignoring **Chapter 8.6 - Coyote Management Goals & Strategies for 2020-2030 (pg.94).**

"Goal #6. Conservation of other species;

- *Continue trapper education and promote outreach materials on how to minimize incidental capture of lynx during the early canid trapping season. (Ongoing; High Priority)*
- *Keep working with USDA WS to manage coyote predation on **New England Cottontails** and rare shorebirds. (Ongoing; Moderate Priority)*
- *Compile all available data sources, develop metrics, and identify data gaps to improve the Predator Management Program. (New; High Priority)".*

Ironically, some of the Representatives who cosponsored this bill reside in the same geographical area as the New England Cottontail. Perhaps they should rename this bill as **An Act To Increase the Coyote Population in Maine to the Detriment of All Other Species!**

LD-814 indirectly infringes on our Constitutional Right to Food.

Living off the land is not as far-fetched as it sounds. Many people in rural Maine are part of the "Homesteaders Movement". They hunt, farm, and raise livestock for their own food and avoid the grocery store whenever possible. Deer hunting puts meat in the freezer which helps many families get through the winter months when they can't hunt deer. But Coyotes can.....and they do! They pose a threat to deer

12 months of the year; eating our fawns in the spring and adult deer whenever they can! It is estimated that coyotes currently number about 12,000. This bill will allow their population to grow quickly and as their numbers swell, the deer population will decline! When the deer are all gone are we supposed to eat the coyotes? Do they have a right to food or was that amendment intended for us?

LD-814 eliminates the ability of the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife to use lawful hunting of Coyotes as a legitimate Management tool!

Since 1971, nearly every Legislature prior to the 131st (with some exceptions) has enacted laws intended to optimize coyote hunting and trapping opportunities for sportsmen in an attempt to manage their population. The MDIFW has meticulously followed the principles set forth in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. This bill is a slap in the face of Commissioner Judith Camuso and her many talented and dedicated employees. Suddenly, and without explanation, this bill tells the IF&W that everything they thought they knew about coyotes is incorrect and coyotes need protection from hunting for a minimum of six months of the year! If this bill were to pass, what's next? Perhaps we will see a bill to defund the Warden Service!

CONCLUSIONS:

In consideration of the foregoing, even the most casual observer must be wondering, why was this bill proposed? What wrong is it trying to make right? We choose not to make this a political argument, but certain questions ought to be answered. For example, why are there only Democrats sponsoring LD-814? And why are 7 of the 8 Representatives women? And why are they all from Southern Maine? There are no Republicans or Independents backing this bill and there is no Representative from either party who calls northern Maine home!

In the absence of any stated intentions regarding the need and purpose of this bill, the only logical inference that can be drawn from these facts is that this proposed bill was proffered as an accommodation for a constituent.

But who would want to enact such a horrible law to give unneeded protection to the outlaws of the animal kingdom? To us, LD-814 reeks

of a being a thinly veiled first step to incrementally eliminate hunting by the PETA or HSUS crowd. Referendums are too costly and time consuming, so apparently, their new strategy is to get the Maine Legislature to do their dirty work for them! If enacted, this bill steals 50% of our present daytime hunting opportunities (183 days) and 70% of our nighttime opportunities (259 days)! The Coyote population will be out of control!

In any event, we beg the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to help us stop this extreme cruelty.



This photo shows a buck, who was being savagely attacked and eaten alive by Coyotes, escaping to the water in an attempt to save his life. Sadly, after 36 hours of suffering, he succumbed to his wounds and was devoured.

LD-814 OUGHT NOT TO PASS!