

**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES &
WILDLIFE**

L.D. 1569 Sec. 10

**AN ACT TO RESTORE THE WHITE-TAILED DEER POPULATION AND
IMPROVE MAINE'S WILDLIFE ECONOMY AND HERITAGE; PREDATOR
CONTROL**

SPONSORED BY: PRESIDENT RAYE OF WASHINGTON

**COSPONSORED BY: REPRESENTATIVE CRAFTS OF LISBON
REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS OF SANGERVILLE
REPRESENTATIVE ESPLING OF NEW GLOUCESTER
SENATOR MARTIN OF KENNEBEC
REPRESENTATIVE SHAW OF STANDISH
SENATOR TRAHAN OF LINCOLN**

JANUARY 9, 2012

***A Program for the Management of Predators of
Deer and Predation of Deer in Maine:***

Recommendations by the 2011 Deer Predation Advisory Group

Working Group Members:

Dave Craven, Maine Warden Service; **Donald Dudley**, hunter, trapper, Maine guide; **Shawn Haskell**, MDIFW Wildlife Scientist; **Gerry Lavigne**, Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM); **Jerry McLaughlin**, President, Aroostook County Conservation Assoc. (ACCA); **Skip Trask**, Maine Professional Guides Association (MPGA); **Dan Wagner**, President, Maine Trappers Association (MTA).

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Randy Cross, Bear Biologist

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The following are the recommendations of the Working Group:

Funding of Predator and Predation Management

To create stable long-term source of funding to support predator and predation management to benefit deer populations in Maine that are below density objectives, the Group identified recent and potential legislative action in a 3-tiered results-based approach that is: 1) promote the recently established volunteer check-off fund that should appear on MDIFW's website in the coming months; 2) work with the Legislature to establish the \$100K F&W ADC fund that found some favor in this past 125th session; 3) a \$1 or \$2 mandatory deer tag dedicated to ADC.

Information and Outreach for Predator and Predation Management

- The Group believes that MDIFW needs more consistent and effective outreach and messaging from human and internet sources about coyotes, other predators, and their potential effects on deer. Such messaging should promote: 1) the economic value of a viewable and huntable white-tailed deer population and trapping/hunting of furbearers; 2) the scientific validity of predator and predation management programs when conducted with focused, tactical, and proven techniques; 3) the need for resources to fund actions, monitor results, and plan accordingly; 4) recreational coyote and bear hunting in general and a need for participation from sportsmen all over the state; 5) the need for trained ADC agents, and some practices that they use (e.g., hounding in winter) may be advisable for trained ADC agents, but not the general public, even if legal for all; 6) that trapping and hunting help keep wild animals wild; large predators such as bears and coyotes are more likely to develop behaviors that can be dangerous to humans where they are not exposed to hunting or trapping.
- Consistent terminology should be used that includes: 1) the "cable-restraint" is a live-capture device that has been developed to catch wild canids and release non-target species alive, that has been tested thoroughly by scientific necropsy surveys, surpassing strict professional trapping standards; 2) predator and predation "management" is more appropriate than "control" because it is a more accurate description of a program that has an uncertain outcome, and this more explicitly places the program within the context and philosophy of wildlife science and management.
- The program recommended by this Group is intended to be an annual program that continues indefinitely, preferably with ways to measure effort, success, and overall efficacy. The goal of this program is NOT to eradicate predators; it is to manage the influence of predators on deer mortality to help increase deer numbers and achieve deer population objectives established through a planning process that was driven by a public working group.
- A primary target audience should be Maine's general public because grass-roots support is needed to undertake wildlife management action plans such as predator and predation management over long periods of time; such action plans tend to be more socially acceptable among rural communities and may require more information and education to be acceptable to more suburban- and urban-dwelling citizens.

- An executive summary of brief and specific points is needed as a center-piece for the MDIFW website and other outlets.
- MDIFW staff should develop bulleted messaging and also 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs) with answers that are based on fact and science. Other factors limiting deer populations below objective levels should be identified and addressed (such as the 2011 'Game Plan' for deer).

Predator and Predation Management Actions

Qualifying Area – Wildlife Management Districts (WMDs) that are below target deer density objectives and have reasonable assurances that major Deer Wintering Areas (DWAs) will be managed for winter cover into the foreseeable future (e.g., those primarily on state lands, and then those with private landowner cooperative agreements).

COYOTES

Intensive Coyote & Predation Management Areas – these are areas with high-value DWAs and surrounding summer-autumn range, as identified by regional wildlife biologists, to receive both proactive and reactive predator and predation management by ADC agents using specialized techniques. There should be at least 3 DWAs per Region (MDIFW Regions C, D, E, F, & G). Prioritization of DWAs within a Region should at first be by biological relevance, but DWAs on public lands should be given more priority as additional funding for more proactive ADC becomes available.

- Objective: annually reduce coyote density in the Intensive Management Area between early-autumn and early-winter. Monitor coyote presence and manage predation events as needed through winter.
- Personnel: ADC agents, to be identified by Regional Wildlife Biologists and Game Wardens, solicited by Regional Wildlife Biologists, trained by MDIFW staff or other agent of the Commissioner, permitted by the ADC Coordinator/Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, and deployed by the Regional Wildlife Biologists in consultation with Game Wardens.
 - i. Permitting of hunting methods should not require a trapping license.
 - ii. Each Region involved in the program should have a day of training annually in late-summer or early-autumn that involves both hunting and trapping techniques. Use of hounds during winter months should require training by a MDIFW wildlife biologist knowledgeable in deer biology and laws restricting the running of deer by dogs. Use of cable-restraints should require special training that includes field demonstration.
 - iii. Department employees should be allowed to participate with the ADC program in accordance with Department policy.
 - iv. Deployment should occur with monthly reports of activities submitted to the Regional Wildlife Biologists to be forwarded to Game Wardens and the ADC Coordinator. ADC agents should notify the Regional Biologists and Game Wardens when a change of location and activity is desired.
- Techniques: most efficient and cost-effective for the time, place, and personnel available. Specialized ADC techniques include: night-hunting over bait in autumn (including Sept 1st – Dec 15th) with illumination; calling & shooting over bait near DWAs; hunting with hounds from early winter through spring; cable-restraints; trapping during any time of year.

- Certain trapping techniques may not be permissible in areas covered by the federal judicial consent decree for lynx and may be inadvisable for other areas known to have lynx.
- Autumn ADC techniques should be scheduled and implemented in a manner that minimizes conflicts with licensed hunters and trappers and other users of the forests at that time of year.
- Documentation: date, location, method, effort, and catch should be documented.
- Disbursement of funds: ADC agents may be compensated for hunting/trapping of coyotes within the limits of the ADC budget. The expectation of compensation and performance should be provided clearly to agents before deployment. Volunteer ADC agents should be permissible, and ADC agents should be allowed to market coyotes taken. MDIFW may also provide lodging in Dept. camps, with accountability, when available to help defray travel costs to remote areas.

Regular Licensed Hunters and Trappers (in accordance with existing regulations) – should seek guidance from Regional Wildlife Biologists, Game Wardens, ADC agents, and members of SAM, MTA, MPGA, and other local- and county-based fish and game associations to locate areas and methods suitable for them to volunteer their assistance to help manage predators and predation within their acceptable area of regular operation. MDIFW should provide instructional materials and links to instructional materials for coyote hunting and trapping on their website.

- MDIFW staff should provide road-killed deer or moose, as available, for volunteer hunters or trappers needing bait, with priority given to fulfilling requests of ADC agents.
- Local- and county-based fish and game associations should help coordinate localized hunting and trapping efforts to manage coyotes and predation by coyotes around the Intensive Management Areas.
- Coordinated operations, whether by, local-, county-, or statewide private organizations, *within* Intensive Management Areas should be discussed with Regional Wildlife Biologists, Game Wardens, and ADC agents prior to actions taken.
- MDIFW, SAM, MTA, and MPGA will pursue a separate “Adopt a DWA Program” to facilitate coyote removals during fall and winter by volunteer individuals and groups (e.g., Fish & Game clubs, snowmobile and ATV clubs, etc) in both remote and easily-accessed areas. Qualifying area is statewide, wherever the volunteer organization operates, but focus should be near Intensive Management Areas if possible to directly help prevent ingress of coyotes into those areas.
- SAM, MTA, and MPGA will solicit the participation of sporting camp owners who are willing to provide free lodging to volunteer hunters and trappers while operating in their area. SAM, MTA, and MPGA may also be able to negotiate free or reduced camping fees from NMW Assoc. and/or individual timber companies that may have camps.

BLACK BEARS

- Bear population and predation management should be by regularly licensed hunters and trappers; ADC agents should not be needed as a first line of action.

- Targeted bear population and predation management should be focused in and around the Intensive Coyote and Predation Management Areas as deemed appropriate by MDIFW.
- MDIFW should consider a 3-tiered results-based approach to bear population and predation management that should proceed in this order: 1) promotion of the existing bear hunting and trapping programs and use of meat and hides; 2) a second bear-hunting tag on an annual basis; and, 3) a carefully regulated spring hunt by WMD.

BOBCATS

- Bobcat population and predation management should be by regularly licensed hunters and trappers; ADC agents should not be needed as a first line of action.
- Targeted bobcat population and predation management should be focused in and around the Intensive Coyote and Predation Management Areas as deemed necessary by MDIFW.
- In areas where reliable anecdotal accounts suggest numerous bobcats in recent times, MDIFW should examine historic survey data and design new surveys to document indices of abundance.
- MDIFW should consider viable techniques to reduce localized bobcat abundance by WMD, such as the keeping of bobcats taken incidentally during the early canid trapping season or extension of the hound-hunting season later in winter.

Long-term Strategies

- In any program that attempts to increase a prey animal by reducing the effects of its predator(s), it is important not only to document the effort and immediate results, but also the long-term results.
- In and around the Intensive Coyote and Predation Management Areas, periodic surveys should be made of deer and deer-predator species for indices, or estimates, of abundance. In this way, it may be determined if efforts were successful at some scale.
- Seek a lynx-ITP for cable-restraints after a lynx-ITP for trapping has been acquired.
- Consider petitioning the USFWS to remove Maine from the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing of lynx.
- Consider petitioning the USFWS to list northern New England as its own Distinct Population Segment of lynx in the existing listing of lynx under the ESA.
- MDIFW I&E personnel and Office of Tourism should work together to promote Maine's world-class bear hunt. Necessary infrastructure is already here, and more bear hunters and harvest of bears could help MDIFW manage Maine's bear population to be near objective levels.

Evaluation of Success & Adaptive Management

Success should be viewed in terms of specific objectives, such as:

- Establish a stable source of funds for predator and predation management for deer in Maine;
- Establish consistent and effective messaging to support predator and predation management;

- Efficiently and effectively deploy ADC agents to control predation at critical deer wintering areas;
- Efficiently and effectively use hunters and trappers to help reduce predatorial influences on deer;
- Increase abundance of deer in northern, eastern, and western Maine, which may require successful management of other factors limiting deer populations in those areas;
- Improve local economies in northern, eastern, and western Maine in response to more time and money spent by resident and non-resident hunters hunting both predators and deer.

MDIFW should develop an adaptive management plan that sets monitoring criteria for evaluation of both predator and prey populations and identifies thresholds when predator/predation management efforts will cease or be modified.