

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE**

IN OPPOSITION TO L. D. 814

“AN ACT TO RESTRICT THE DAYTIME AND NIGHTTIME KILLING OF COYOTES”

Presented by Representative WILLIAMS of Bar Harbor.

Cosponsored by Representatives: COLLINGS of Portland, COPELAND of Saco, EATON of Deer Isle, GEIGER of Rockland, MATHIESON of Kittery, MILLETT of Cape Elizabeth, WARREN of Scarborough, Senator: GROHOSKI of Hancock.

DATE OF HEARING: April 3, 2023

Good afternoon Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department in opposition to **L.D. 814**.

This bill limits the open season for daytime hunting of coyotes to October 1st to March 31st and prohibits daytime hunting of coyotes at all other times during the year. For daytime hunting of coyotes during periods of the year outside the open season, the bill imposes a \$500 fine and a revocation of a person’s hunting license for one year. It also amends the night hunting season for coyotes, which is currently December 16th to August 31st, to December 16th to March 31st. Finally, it also amends the period of time in which the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife may appoint agents to hunt for coyotes at night, which is currently September 1st to December 15th, to October 1st to December 15th.

Coyote management is often controversial because it involves social, biological, and political considerations. Although coyotes did not historically occur in Maine, they are considered a naturalized species, like Virginia opossums, that expanded their range through natural dispersal. Coyotes were first documented in Maine in the 1930s and were well-established by the 1970s. Since then, coyotes have been managed as a furbearer through regulated trapping and hunting. Since 1972, the hunting of coyotes has been open year-round, and a special night hunting season began in 1983. Maine’s regulations for coyote hunting are similar to most other states, which typically allow year-round hunting opportunities.

The Department recently completed a comprehensive planning process to develop updated management goals and strategies for coyotes and other furbearer species. The planning effort involved extensive public consultation through scientific surveys and committee work. That planning effort indicated that public attitudes towards coyotes tend to be unfavorable, with more people viewing coyotes as dangerous or a nuisance (38%) than those that enjoy seeing or having them around (8%). Coyotes had the lowest favorability rating among furbearer species, with many of the negative attitudes related to impacts on deer. Predation on deer was most concerning to residents in northern Maine, where deer populations continue to struggle due to combined effects of severe winter weather, habitat conditions, and predation.

Nonetheless, many Mainers do value coyotes for their unique ecological role as carnivores and as a now-permanent part of the state's assemblage of wildlife species. Several participants in the planning effort, and many members of the public, were also concerned that the current year-round hunting season allows hunting during the period when coyotes are raising their young. This is in conflict with the general principal of establishing hunting and trapping seasons only at times of the year that minimizes the likelihood of orphaning dependent offspring. However, since there was a lack of committee consensus to alter coyote hunting season dates, our new coyote management plan does not advance a recommendation to do so.

Given the diversity of perspectives on this issue, we feel that it is best left to the legislative process to determine if establishing sideboards on coyote hunting season dates is warranted. That being said, our coyote population is abundant and there is no indication that the current season framework is limiting the population. Therefore, we do not feel that reducing the season length by 50%, as proposed in this bill, is warranted. Were this bill to pass as written, Maine would have one of the most restrictive coyote hunting seasons in the country. In addition, we are concerned that rather than establishing sideboards, this bill would establish fixed dates for the coyote hunting season, restricting the Department's ability to set season dates in rule and react in a timely manner to changes in the coyote population, public attitudes, and hunter participation.

There are several strategies in the Department's new management plan that are already underway to better inform the status of the coyote population and harvest levels. Most importantly, communication is needed to foster broader public understanding and acceptance of coyotes as a valuable species that is here to stay on the landscape.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.