

FEASIBILITY STATEMENTS FOR EASTERN COYOTE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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For Wildlife Management Districts Where the Deer Population is at or Above Long-term Management Goals for Deer

Goal: Provide hunting and trapping opportunity for coyotes.

Objective: Maintain existing hunting and trapping opportunities while allowing the coyote population to fluctuate naturally.

Desirability: Many hunters, trappers, and outdoor enthusiasts take advantage of the recreational opportunities associated with coyotes (e.g., hunting, trapping, nonconsumptive enjoyment). By maintaining existing hunting and trapping opportunities, we will provide consumptive users of coyotes considerable opportunity to pursue their interests. At the same time, the level of opportunity for nonconsumptive users to see and listen to coyotes will not be diminished. Coyotes readily compensate for normal hunting and trapping losses by increasing their reproductive rates. The promotion of coyote hunting and trapping opportunities may shift public attitudes from a focus on managing coyotes as nuisance animals, to managing them as game animals. Opposition to maintaining existing hunting and trapping opportunities may come from anti-hunting and trapping advocates. By allowing coyote populations to fluctuate naturally, coyotes will continue to function as important predators in Maine's ecological communities. However, some deer hunters may not be satisfied with "allowing the coyote population to fluctuate naturally".

Feasibility: Maintaining existing hunting and trapping opportunities in areas where the deer population is at or above its current management goal (primarily central and southern Maine) will be dependent on maintaining access to private lands for hunters and trappers. In addition, sufficient open-space will need to be maintained to allow these activities. The Department will need to increase public awareness on the detrimental effects of posted-land and promote the maintenance of open-space. Proportionally, fewer people are taking up hunting than in previous generations. By promoting different forms of coyote hunting (hunting with dogs, night hunting, and competitive hunts), the Department will help counteract any attrition in the number of coyote hunters. Recent passage of anti-trapping initiatives in other states (i.e., Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, and California) is indicative of a growing anti-trapping sentiment among the general public. Unless public education efforts on

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the positive aspects of trapping are increased in Maine, residents of this state may follow national trends and increasingly look unfavorably upon trapping.

Capability of Habitat: Coyote densities are not directly dependent on habitat conditions in the state. Rather, coyote densities are determined by space requirements and prey availability. The Department's ability to achieve this objective will not be restricted by the capability of the habitat to support coyotes.

Possible Consequences: If current hunting and trapping opportunities are maintained for coyotes, those people who participate in these activities should be satisfied. This should help maintain license revenues and bring income to people who are directly or indirectly associated with these activities. Maintaining coyote hunting and trapping opportunities will let the public address nuisance problems caused by specific coyotes. However, it will be nearly impossible to reduce the coyote population for an extended period of time by using traditional hunting and trapping methods. Anti-hunting and trapping advocates may use coyote hunting and trapping as an example of why hunting and trapping, in general, should not be allowed. Coyote hunting often involves the use of dogs to chase coyotes, and coyotes are trapped using foothold traps. Hunting with dogs and the use of foothold traps have been targeted by these groups in the past. By allowing coyote populations to fluctuate naturally, coyotes will continue to function as important predators in Maine's ecological communities. However, some deer hunters may want the coyote population reduced.

For Wildlife Management Districts Where the Deer Population is Below Long-term Management Goals for Deer

Goal: Provide hunting and trapping opportunity for coyotes.

Objective: Implement local coyote control where coyote predation is suspected to be limiting long-term goals for deer; otherwise, allow the coyote population to fluctuate naturally.

Desirability: In northern and downeast Maine, coyote control has been a high profile agenda for some segments of the public for a number of years. Local coyote control may involve several forms of lethal coyote removal (i.e., trapping, hunting, and snaring). However, the Department has responded to calls for local coyote control primarily through a coyote-snaring program. Continuing coyote control will allow the public to have a hand in trying to alleviate predation pressure on deer. By allowing the public to participate in coyote control, proponents of coyote control may be satisfied that the Department is acting upon their request to relieve predation pressure on deer. However, it is not known whether the current snaring program, or other forms of coyote control, has any effect on increasing local or regional deer

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numbers. By continuing the coyote control program, the public may perceive the Department implicitly believes the control program has a strong biological basis, when in fact, the biological benefits of coyote control are unknown. Snaring is controversial because other wildlife or pets may be incidentally killed, and snares must be properly deployed to ensure that they humanely kill coyotes. Consequently, continuation of the snaring program may be undesirable, in that anti-trapping groups may use it to build public sentiment against snaring and trapping in general. In addition, the general public may become critical of the program if a high profile species, such as lynx or bobcat, is killed in a snare.

Feasibility: The implementation of local coyote control will depend on the willingness of the public to participate in coyote control, public attitudes towards the various forms of coyote control, and restrictions on coyote control where there is a likelihood of incidentally killing other wildlife (e.g., lynx, bobcat, and deer). Although some segments of the public are very vocal in support of the snaring program, the number of people willing to snare coyotes is not high. Currently, the Department contracts with experienced snarers to kill coyotes in areas where deer predation is perceived to be a serious problem. Even with contract snarers, it will be difficult to find enough snarers to adequately cover all of the potential problem areas in downeast and northern Maine. The Department will need to encourage other forms of coyote control and continue to offer incentives and training for people wishing to snare coyotes. Conflicts may arise between people wanting to hunt coyotes with hounds, and snarers. For local coyote control to be effective, coyote control must be maintained in an area throughout the period when deer are most vulnerable to predation. Coyotes are highly mobile, and a significant segment of the coyote population is non-territorial. If local coyotes are removed from an area, dispersing coyotes can quickly fill the void. Coyote control must also be maintained year after year to decrease coyote predation rates on deer; otherwise, an area where a large number of coyotes were removed one winter, will be occupied by coyotes again the following winter. The potential public backlash from incidentally killing other wildlife or pets may be sufficient to threaten the snaring program. Currently, the Department is working with snarers to minimize the chance of a bobcat, lynx, eagle, or dispersing wolf being caught in a snare. These efforts need to continue to have a successful snaring program. It will also be essential for the Department to work with snarers to ensure that the most humane methods are used to snare coyotes. In addition, the public may become concerned about using snares or hunting with hounds to kill coyotes.

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Possible Consequences: If coyote control is implemented, a segment of the public will feel that they are helping the local deer herd and reducing the number of coyotes. If adequate coyote control measures are maintained in an area, winter

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mortality rates for deer may decrease. However, the possibility exists that the removal of territorial coyotes may allow additional non-territorial coyotes into an area, and exacerbate the deer predation problem. The Department will need to address conflicts between user groups that are interested in controlling local coyote populations using different methods. In particular, hunters that use dogs to chase coyotes are concerned about their dogs getting caught in snares. Although areas in which snares are set are required to be clearly marked, a dog chasing a coyote may travel a long distance from where it initially encountered a coyote and be exposed to snares the hunter is not aware of. If the public finds certain methods of coyote control socially unacceptable, political pressure may develop to end or alter the Department's current coyote control program. If such opposition develops against coyote control, it may reflect negatively against the Department and decrease public acceptance for hunting or trapping, in general.