

Testimony of: Linda Huebner

Submitted to: House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife

Regarding: H.60, An Act Relating to the Hunting of Coyotes

Date: February 17, 2017

Chairman Deen and Honorable members of the Committee, thank you for considering my testimony. I am sorry that I could not attend the hearing in person; I live in Halifax – prohibitively far from Montpelier.

I am grateful to Chairman Deen for filing this legislation and appreciate the intentions behind it; however, I would suggest that it be expanded to be more useful for updating Vermont's outdated policies regarding coyotes. As a member of Vermont Coyote Coexistence Coalition, I support VCCC's proposed changes.

I have done graduate work in wildlife and natural resource policy, as well as human dimensions of wildlife management – essentially, a sociological look at the conflicts between humans and wildlife. Reaction to and/or prevention of conflict is often used to justify killing coyotes whenever the opportunity arises, but that strategy will not help, as the coyotes killed while hunting other game or during killing contests are not likely the same individuals causing conflict. Further, the latter animals can legally be killed without allowing fully open seasons, hounding, electronic calls, and/or contest hunts.

Coyotes have survived decades of persecution in the United States. As possibly the most maligned species in the country, they have been poisoned, trapped, and shot – yet they have increased their population and expanded their range – and filled the niche left open by our removal of the wolf. Coyotes are one of the most adaptable and intelligent animals and our attempts to control their population have artificially selected for the wiliest among them. Those surviving coyotes increase their reproduction to compensate for the killing. It's as if Darwinian evolution has been given a boost; coyotes epitomize the idea of survival of the fittest.

Having a fully open season, as Vermont currently does, allows for coyotes to be killed when they have dependent young, orphaning the pups. Their pelts are not prime during this time of year, so killing them also constitutes wanton waste. There are no ethics in such a policy. Coyote contest hunts take this absurdity to an extreme. Like old-fashioned bounties on wolves, these misguided enticements to kill the smallest, largest, or most violate every ethic of hunting. These events are slaughters, not hunts. They are not based on science. They do not result in population management – of coyotes or their prey. The hunting community should be ashamed of events like this. They are paying the price in terms of the public perception of hunting and significant acres of land posted in response to these contests.

Deer hunters have made coyotes into scapegoats, but even deer biologists will say that coyotes are not responsible for the decline in Vermont's deer herd. Coyotes will scavenge on deer carcasses and take the occasional fawn, but trophy bucks are not on their menu. Luckily for Vermont's farmers, coyotes eat mostly small animals that would otherwise overrun their grain bins. Coyotes are an important part of a healthy ecosystem and should be respected and treated as such.

I hope that the committee will consider amending H.60 to reflect the suggestions of the Vermont Coyote Coexistence Coalition. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Huebner".

Linda Huebner