



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Testimony By: Barry Londeree

Presented To: House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife

In Support Of: H.60, An act relating to the hunting of coyotes

Date: January 25, 2018

Dear Chairman Deen and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Barry Londeree. I am the Vermont State Director for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of legislative action to establish a closed season on coyotes and to end wildlife killing contests in the state of Vermont.

A growing number of wildlife scientists and state wildlife management agencies are acknowledging that the random killing of coyotes, such as is done in wildlife killing contests, is not consistent with the principles of modern, science-based wildlife management. The evidence is clear: over 100 years of coyote shooting, poisoning, and trapping has not reduced their populations. In fact, since 1850 when mass killings of coyotes began, the range of coyotes has tripled in the United States.ⁱ As the University of Illinois points out, "...coyote population reduction (removing some or all of the coyotes in an area) is usually unrealistic and always temporary."ⁱⁱ In fact, the indiscriminate killing of coyotes can stimulate increases in their populations by disrupting their social structure, which, ironically, encourages more breeding and migration, and ultimately results in more coyotes.ⁱⁱⁱ

The alpha pair in a pack of coyotes is normally the only one that reproduces. When one or both members of the alpha pair are killed, other pairs will form and reproduce. At the same time, lone coyotes will move in to mate, young coyotes will start having offspring sooner, and litter sizes will grow.^{iv} While widespread killing may temporarily reduce coyote numbers, coyotes bounce back quickly, even when up to 70 percent of their numbers are removed.^v

In addition, year-round, unrestricted hunting and wildlife killing contests that target coyotes will not reduce conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock. These practices target coyotes in woodlands and grasslands who are keeping to themselves, not coyotes who have become habituated to human food sources such as unsecured garbage, pet food, or livestock carcasses that have been left by humans.

Coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems, providing a number of free, natural ecological services. For example, coyotes help to control disease transmission, keep rodent populations in check, clean up animal carcasses, increase biodiversity, remove sick animals from the gene pool, and protect crops. Coyotes balance their ecosystems and have trophic cascade effects such as indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores and increasing the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.^{vi}

Additionally, indiscriminate killing of coyotes through open hunts or killing contests will not increase game populations. While coyotes have a diverse diet, their favorite prey are rabbits and rodents.^{vii} The best available science demonstrates that killing native carnivores to increase ungulate populations, such as deer, is unlikely to produce positive results because the key to ungulate survival is protecting breeding females and providing access to adequate nutrition, not preventing predation.^{viii} Comprehensive studies, including those conducted in Colorado^{ix} and Idaho,^x show that killing native carnivores fails to grow deer herds. In recent studies that involved predator removal, those removals had no beneficial effect for mule deer.^{xi}

In 2016, in response to deer hunters who speculated that coyotes were having an adverse effect on their quarry, the Pennsylvania Game Commission issued a comprehensive statement that said, “During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Game Commission focused much of its energy and resources into predator control efforts. During this period, we did not understand the relationship between predators and prey. After decades of using predator control (such as paying bounties) with no effect, and the emergence of wildlife management as a science, the agency finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work.” The commission added, “[Predators] don’t compete with our hunters for game. The limiting factor is habitat—we must focus our efforts on habitat, and called it a “false prophecy” to “pretend that predator control can return small game hunting to the state.” Further, it stated that the focus must be based on “...science, not anecdotal comments stemming from theory or supposition.”^{xii}

A study by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation found that on the whole, data indicated that deer numbers were growing in the presence of well-established coyote populations. That agency recommended against opening up a year-round coyote hunt, basing their decision in part on the fact that “...random removal of coyotes resulting from a year-round hunting season will not: (a) control or reduce coyote populations; (b) reduce or eliminate predation on livestock; or (c) result in an increase in deer densities.”^{xiii}

But in an addition to the widespread support of the biological science on this issue, we believe it is crucially important to also consider the social science. The wildlife of Vermont is held in the public trust, for the enjoyment of all citizens. And those citizens have made it clear that while they may be supportive of hunting, they have less and less tolerance for practices—such as year-round, limitless coyote hunting, or wildlife killing contests—that they believe to be inhumane, unsporting, wasteful, or ineffective. We hope that legislators will listen to their constituents when they express such concerns.

In wildlife killing contests, participants compete for cash and prizes for killing wild animals including coyotes, bobcats, foxes, and many other species. Prizes are awarded on a variety of criteria, including the largest, smallest, or heaviest animals killed, or are based on a point system ascribed to each species killed. Gambling may also be a part of these contests, in the form of raffles and drawings for high-value items such as rifles and other hunting equipment, and non-participants may even bet on the outcome of the contest. These contests are no more than a blood sport, flouting the hunting ethics of sportsmanship and fair chase with the use of high-tech equipment, including predator calling devices. Wildlife killing contests also send a dangerous message to the youth of our state that hunting is about nothing more than

gratuitous killing for “fun,” cash, and bragging rights. This is not a good representation of Vermont’s longstanding outdoors tradition.

For all of these reasons, it is time for Vermont to adopt changes in law that will reform the virtually unregulated open coyote hunting season and put a stop to gruesome, wasteful, and inhumane wildlife killing contests.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and your Committee’s attention to this important legislation.

ⁱ Robert Crabtree and Jennifer Sheldon, “Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone,” in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience*, ed. T. Clark et al. (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1999)

ⁱⁱ University of Illinois Extension. *Living with Wildlife in Illinois: Coyote*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, http://web.extension.illinois.edu/wildlife/directory_show.cfm?species=coyote.

ⁱⁱⁱ F. Knowlton, E. M. Gese, and M. M. Jaeger, “Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management,” *Journal of Range Management* 52, no. 5 (1999); Robert Crabtree and Jennifer Sheldon, “Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone,” in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience*, ed. T. Clark et al. (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1999); J. M. Goodrich and S. W. Buskirk, “Control of Abundant Native Vertebrates for Conservation of Endangered Species,” *Conservation Biology* 9, no. 6 (1995).

^{iv} Knowlton, F.F. 1972. Preliminary interpretations of coyote population mechanics with some management implications. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 36:369-382.

^v Connolly, G.E. 1978. Predator control and coyote populations: a review of simulation models. Pages 327-345 in M. Bekoff, ed. *Coyotes: biology, behavior, and management*. Academic Press, New York, N.Y.

^{vi} S. E. Henke and F. C. Bryant, “Effects of Coyote Removal on the Faunal Community in Western Texas,” *Journal of Wildlife Management* 63, no. 4 (1999); K. R. Crooks and M. E. Soule, “Mesopredator Release and Avifaunal Extinctions in a Fragmented System,” *Nature* 400, no. 6744 (1999); E. T. Mezquida, S. J. Slater, and C. W. Benkman, “Sage-Grouse and Indirect Interactions: Potential Implications of Coyote Control on Sage-Grouse Populations,” *Condor* 108, no. 4 (2006); N. M. Waser et al., “Coyotes, Deer, and Wildflowers: Diverse Evidence Points to a Trophic Cascade,” *Naturwissenschaften* 101, no. 5 (2014).

^{vii} A. M. Kitchen, E. M. Gese, and E. R. Schauster, “Resource Partitioning between Coyotes and Swift Foxes: Space, Time, and Diet,” *Canadian Journal of Zoology-Revue Canadienne De Zoologie* 77, no. 10 (1999).

^{viii} Bishop, C. J., G. C. White, D. J. Freddy, B. E. Watkins, and T. R. Stephenson. 2009. Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-28; Hurley, M. A., J. W. Unsworth, P. Zager, M. Hebblewhite, E. O. Garton, D. M. Montgomery, J. R. Skalski, and C. L. Maycock. 2011. Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-33.; Forrester, T. D. and H. U. Wittmer. 2013. A review of the population dynamics of mule deer and black-tailed deer *Odocoileus hemionus* in North America. *Mammal Review* 43:292-308.; Monteith, K. L., V. C. Bleich, T. R. Stephenson, B. M. Pierce, M. M. Conner, J. G. Kie, and R. T. Bowyer. 2014. Life-history characteristics of mule deer: Effects of nutrition in a variable environment. *Wildlife Monographs* 186:1-62.

^{ix} Bishop, C. J., G. C. White, D. J. Freddy, B. E. Watkins, and T. R. Stephenson. 2009. Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-28.

^x Hurley, M. A., J. W. Unsworth, P. Zager, M. Hebblewhite, E. O. Garton, D. M. Montgomery, J. R. Skalski, and C. L. Maycock. 2011. Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-33.

^{xi} Forrester, T. D. and H. U. Wittmer. 2013. A review of the population dynamics of mule deer and black-tailed deer *Odocoileus hemionus* in North America. *Mammal Review* 43:292-308

^{xii} Frye, Bob. (July 25, 2016). “Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations,” *Trib Live*, <http://triblive.com/sports/outdoors/10756490-74/game-predator-predators>.

^{xiii} New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. (June 1991). *The Status and Impact of Eastern Coyotes in Northern New York*, http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/coystatnny91.pdf.