

Testimony of: Linda Huebner

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

Regarding: Coyotes – proposals to establish a closed season and prohibit killing contests

Date: January 25, 2018

Chairman Deen, Vice-Chairwoman Sullivan, and Honorable members of the Committee, thank you for considering coyotes and my testimony on their behalf. I am sorry that I cannot attend the hearing in person as I live in Halifax – prohibitively far from Montpelier; I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you by phone.

I am very concerned that the current coyote policy enforces a perception that these animals are pests and should be exterminated without regard for their welfare or even for the use of their bodies.

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 the spring and summer when they are rearing their young, so killing them also constitutes wanton waste as their bodies are discarded as mere trash. 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 cannot even be called sport. 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.

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 wildest among them. Those surviving coyotes increase their reproduction to compensate for the killing.

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.

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.

I hope that the committee will advance legislation to establish a closed season on coyotes when they are rearing young and prohibit coyote killing contests in Vermont. We can do better for our wildlife. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Linda Huebner
802-368-7269