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The role of predators and how to deal with predators in Pennsylvania has a rich history. The ideas of what constituted a predator and how to handle predators has changed over the years. For instance, in 1749 squirrels (red and gray) were classified as predators and a bounty of three pence a head was offered! The first recorded predator control action in Pennsylvania was in 1683. One could earn up to 15 schillings for a single wolf. The important point here is that predator control has been an issue in PA for over three hundred years!

As a state, we felt our way through many of these laws. For instance, in 1885, the "Scalp Act" was passed. This act increased the bounty list by adding weasels, hawks, and all but three species of owls. Two years later, the act was repealed due to the slaughter of hawks and owls. It was estimated that 180,000 were killed in a two year period. The lessons learned during this period assisted in increasing studies before drastic measures were passed into law.

One must realize that the individuals who proposed and implemented these early approaches to predator control did not have the studies that we have today. Aldo Leopold himself believed in killing predators on sight during his early years with the Forest Service. It wasn't until later that he developed the ideas that he documented in Game Management and A Sand County Almanac. Many of his ideas were based upon the work performed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The writings and insight from the PGC aided Leopold during his Sporting Arms and Ammunitions Manufacturers' Institute study.

The point that I'm trying to make is that our ideas relating to the role of predators in our landscape is a complicated one, rich with history and politics. The recent report by the Audubon Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Habitat Alliance is a fine example of a modern sociopolitical wildlife management approach. Like all who have read this report, I have my own opinion. I'm smart enough to know that I shouldn't share my opinion on this report without starting a sidebar conversation to this topic. What I would like to point out is that many of our personal beliefs on wildlife management is due to the information provided by the divided sides. I believe that we should disregard the politics and focus on the science. With that said

In the case of introducing a population of coyotes to an urban park, I would encourage you to ask these questions. Have you established the basic life requirements for the species? Have you developed an aggressive public involvement program to educate local property owners on the species? Will you work with property owners to remove readily available food sources? My thought here is even if there was a viable food source within the park boundaries; will the population utilize these sources? What is stopping the population from obtaining sources from outside of the park, especially if that food source requires less energy to obtain? Have you developed an aggressive and thorough monitoring program? Do you have a budget or sources to perform such studies? Do you have a system to revise and modify management practices based upon this information? Finally, have you coordinated with the agencies responsible for the species? This is only a short list of questions. Try to obtain a copy of a similar report, if possible.

Lastly, I would strongly advise looking at the area in terms of a landscape and not as a body determined by a political boundary. Determine what the species will need from the landscape as a whole, regardless of tax parcel mapping and municipal lines. This will aid in the determination of needs for your study.

Cheers,
Duane Peters
Newport, PA