

The Good, The Bad, The Coyote
Submitted by the Natural Resources Commission

Coyotes are members of the dog family. Larger than a red fox and smaller than a gray wolf, they are gray/brown in color and weigh about 30 pounds. Their primary foods are rabbits and mice, but they are very opportunistic, and will feed on other small mammals, fawns, birds, carrion, and even vegetables. Most coyotes avoid people and domestic animals, but occasionally they may also raid garbage cans, and kill domestic cats and small dogs.

Our coyote population in North Oaks is not large. Recently, the Natural Resources Commission fielded some questions as to whether or not we should be removing coyotes within our boundaries. After a little research, here's what the Commissioners discovered:

1. ***Coyote removal may actually INCREASE coyote populations.*** This is because any vacuum left by coyote removal is soon filled by coyotes emigrating from surrounding areas. In addition, the social hierarchy of coyote packs is disrupted, causing pack members to disperse and allowing more females to breed. Finally, research indicates that when they are being hunted, the number of coyote pups that survive to adulthood is increased significantly.

2. ***Coyotes reduce rodent populations.*** Experiments in rural areas have shown that the removal of coyotes results in a dramatic increase in rodent abundance. As we all know, the white-footed mouse and other small mammals carry the Lyme disease bacterium that is transmitted to black-legged ticks, and then to our deer population. Coyotes help keep rodent populations in check.

3. ***Coyotes may slow the population growth of deer in high-density areas through their predation on fawns.***

4. One recent essay suggested that low red fox populations (and thus higher coyote populations, as coyotes out-compete red foxes) correlate with higher Lyme disease rates. However, ***another study suggested proceeding with caution before concluding that the presence of coyotes (or the reduction of red foxes) is the primary cause of increased incidence of Lyme disease cases in the eastern United States.***

Part of the beauty of our community is that we share it with the wild animals. However, if you are concerned about the presence of coyotes, consider the following advice from the Minnesota DNR:

DO:

- ***secure all garbage containers, wildlife feeders, and other food sources to prevent coyote access***
- ***confine small dogs and cats in kennels, or supervise them when outside***
- ***vaccinate all pets for rabies, distemper, parvo, and other diseases, as recommended by a veterinarian***
- ***harass (by chasing, shouting, etc.) any coyotes that do not immediately run from people***

DON'T:

- ***do not feed coyotes***
- ***do not leave pet food outside***
- ***do not allow cats and small dogs outside, unattended***