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# COYOTES AS PART OF TEXAS' FUR TRADE

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**Abstract:** One factor that potentially affects coyote (*Canis latrans*) abundance is recreational and commercial trapping for harvest of coyote fur. Herein I report how the economic impact of coyote pelts has changed from 1979-94 for landowners and trappers from the Texas. Pelt values accounted for over 50% of the variability observed during this 15-year period. The future of this economic incentive for managing coyotes is questionable because of the impending ban by the European Union of furs from North America.

Coyotes enjoy a mixed reputation in Texas. While some farmers and ranchers in Texas view coyotes as vermin (i.e., obstacles to the successful operation of their property), others at the opposite extreme view coyotes in their more romantic role of rustic survivors in a mythical "west".

In reality, coyotes are efficient predators whose impacts on the range are as varied as the systems within which they exist. In some areas of Texas, their influence has resulted in stable systems that provide both long- and short-term benefits to landowners (e.g., white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) populations in south Texas). In other areas, coyotes may be responsible for the volatile and unpredictable nature of systems that make economic planning problematic.

The mixed reputation of coyotes is a reflection of landowners' values and the expectations that they have for their properties. One way of ameliorating the perceived negative impacts of coyotes on the range is by making their management a positive economic element in a landowner's operation. Historically, this has been accomplished through the fur trade.

## Harvest trends

The reported harvest of coyotes in Texas has varied over the past 15 years, but has generally followed a downward trend (Fig. 1). The period 1980-87 demonstrated a flat but variable harvest of pelts, while 1988-94 showed a similar pattern, but at a significantly reduced level. Over this 15-year interval, income from these pelts in Texas has dwindled from over \$1.6 million in 1979 to less than

\$200,000 in 1994 (Figure 2).

Some preservation groups have pointed to the declining coyote harvest (and fur harvest in general which reflects similar trends) as an indicator of over-harvest. They often use these data to support proposals calling for increased protection of all fur-bearing animals. Such efforts by preservation groups have resulted in the banning of leg-hold traps in some communities, and in some cases, has resulted in the banning of all trapping within a state (e.g., Arizona).

The validity of such an argument is simple to evaluate. If the reduction of harvest was due to declining numbers of coyotes, one would expect prices per pelt to increase in the face of a stable demand and declining supply. In other words, a stable demand and a declining supply should be demonstrated by a negative correlation between price per pelt and number of pelts taken.

In Texas however, price per pelt reflects a similar pattern to number of pelts taken (Figure 3), and the relationship between these 2 variables is significantly similar ( $X_1$  is positive,  $df = 13$ ,  $F = 16.09$ ,  $P \leq 0.001$ ). Price alone explains over 50% of the variation in number of pelts taken ( $R_{AD}^2 = 0.52$ ). This suggests that pelt price rather than the availability of coyotes for harvest regulates the number of pelts taken in Texas. There is no indication that coyote populations in Texas are declining.

## Conclusions

This very simplistic analysis of Texas fur harvest suggests factors that influence price per pelt regulate coyote harvest in Texas to a large degree. Fashion, and the changing custom of wearing fur

garments, may be significant among these factors. Fur houses in New York and elsewhere announce the prices that will be paid for pelts from the various furbearing species, and trappers then decide whether it will be feasible to trap rather than follow some other economic pursuit.

Some have suggested that trappers have been forced to give up trapping because of this economic relationship, and may not be able to return to trapping even if prices returned to 1979 levels. While the European Union's ban on furs from North America is expected to have a major impact on the fur

market in the United States, its influence on coyote harvest in Texas may not be significant. The 1994 harvest of approximately 20,000 pelts does not suggest a highly organized trapping effort.

The loss of a viable market for coyote fur may place more emphasis on coyote removal as an active or proactive management strategy for other species. This may be difficult if many who have traditionally been trappers have taken up other sports or vocations. It cannot be assumed that coyote removal will be coincidental to normal fur harvest if fur harvest is not continued as a commercial pursuit.

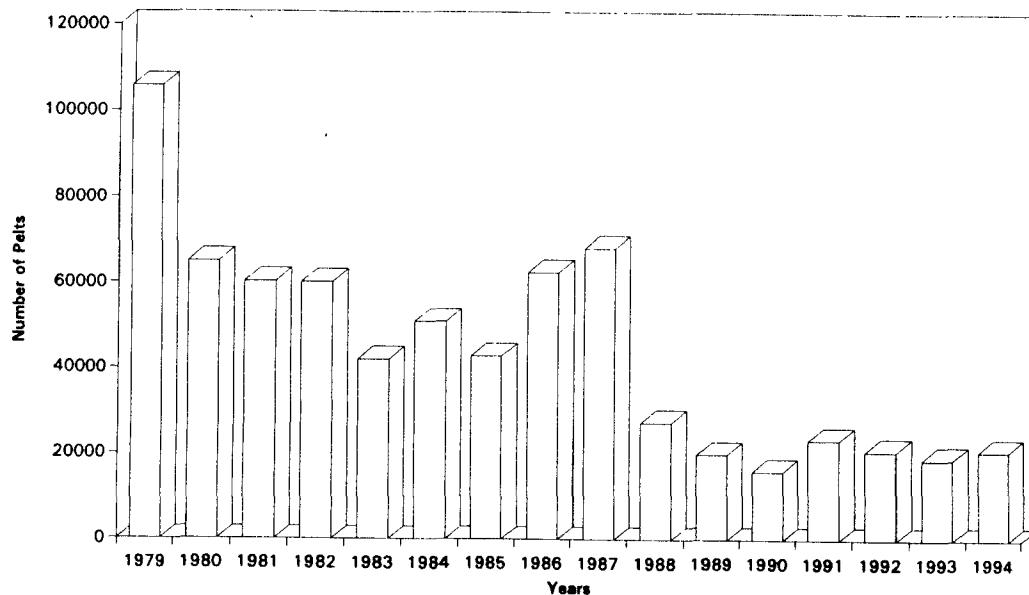


Figure 1. Number of coyote pelts sold in Texas from 1979-94.

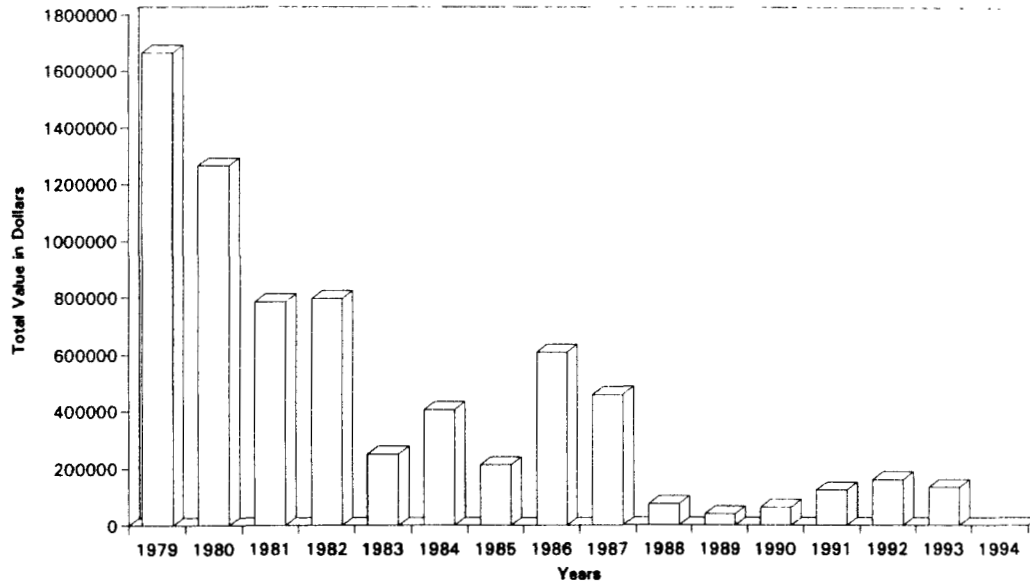


Figure 2 Value of coyote pelts sold in Texas from 1979-94.

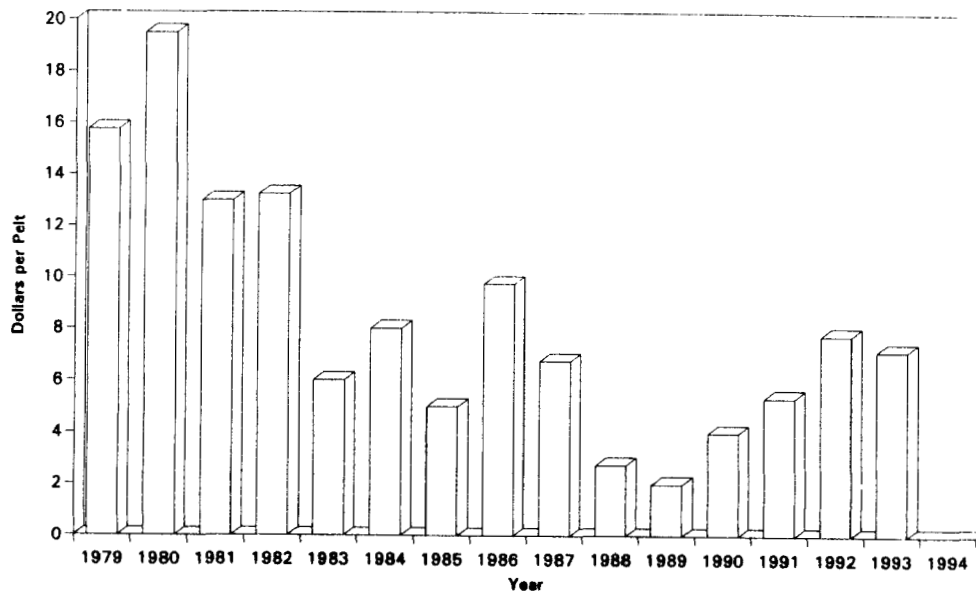


Figure 3. Average price for a coyote pelt sold in Texas from 1979-94