

## **Abstract Title**

Designing a coyote experimental education program using local public engagement research

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## **Abstract:**

Wildlife education programs promote safety when encountering animals. An experiential education program was designed to target risk perceptions and preventative measures that would enable people to feel more comfortable in situations where coyotes are present. The research was conducted near Cape Breton Highlands National Park of Canada (CBHNPC), where a coyote caused a human fatality in 2009. Based on previous research, we explored the effects of an experience-based coyote education program on people's (a) attitudes toward (3 items, Cronbach alpha = 0.90 pre-test and 0.94 post-test), (b) fear of (3 items, Cronbach alpha = 0.90 pre-test and 0.84 post-test), (c) likelihood of (7 items, Cronbach alpha = 0.90 pre-test and 0.89 post-test), and (d) control over (7 items, Cronbach alpha = 0.91 pre-test and 0.91 post-test) coming into contact with coyotes. A pre-post-test comparison (n = 150; 96% completion? rate) was conducted during 20 public education sessions in local communities. The experiential education approach to wildlife safety and coexistence communication had a significant positive effect on people's attitudes and significantly decreased their sense of fear toward coyotes. The program also significantly decreased their sense of likelihood of incident and significantly increased their sense of control over coming into contact with coyotes in their yard and in the park. Effective experiential education programming helps ensure that appropriate messages are getting through to the target audiences.