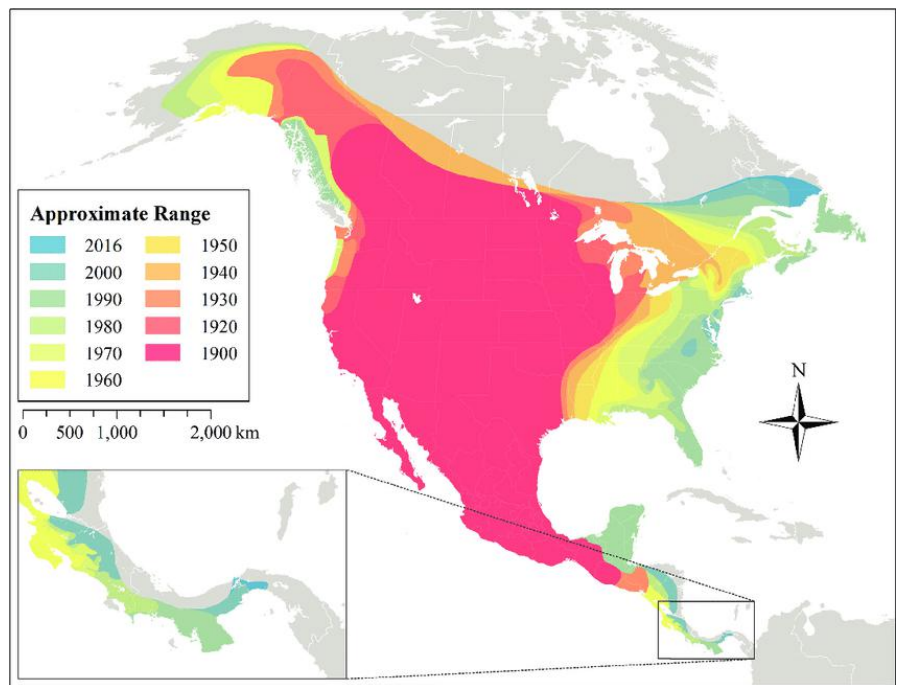
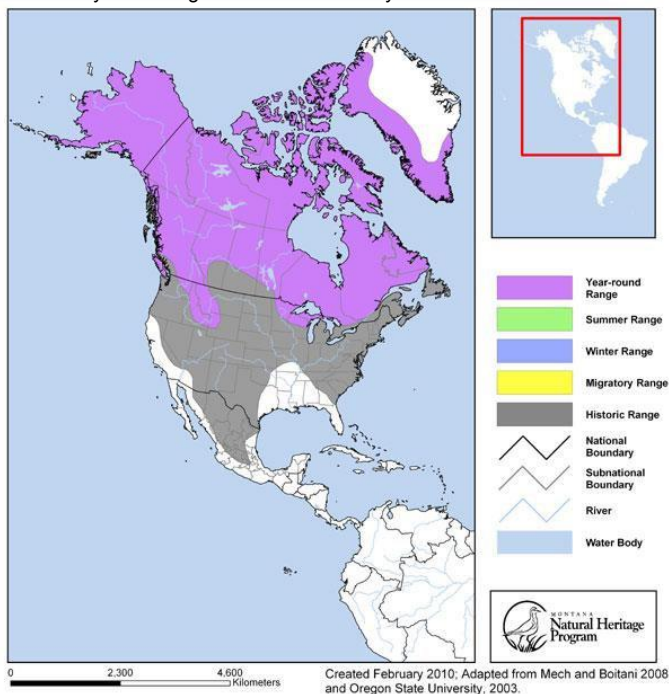


# ON THE ROAD AGAIN: COYOTE



Travelling back in time, Essex County would be a sight to behold. Like falling down a rabbit hole, unfamiliar territories and unknown creatures would have us feeling like we're in a land of wonder. To see the 172,222 hectares of Essex County covered in lush, dense carolinian forests that supports around 2,200 plant species and half of Canada's bird species; vegetation so dense early settlers often described it as eerie and frightening, which is probably why it all came falling down in a blink of an eye... just in time to welcome the Western Coyote. In the 1930s, the western coyote arrived in the area after a 3 decade journey from the America's west coast, as large numbers of settlers established causing an almost treeless landscapes across the country, pushing out large top of the food chain predators like wolves, and cougars only to make way for our clever little friend that has put quite a few miles under its belt.

In Essex county, it was a lush and diverse ecosystem - forest for our black bear and grey wolf friends; open prairies for our Eastern Elk, that unfortunately has become extinct and replaced by the western elk in some regions of the east coast; wetlands for beavers, beavers for grey wolves. But that all came tumbling down... or backfilled, and in the 1930s when the western coyote with big eyes looked across the border from Michigan, it had been decades since Essex County's home team was the grey wolves, a fearless predator that would have ended this story long ago. The grey wolves were long gone... since the 1850s in fact (Carolinian Canada Coalition, 2009). Due to the buzzing forestry industry, hunting and poisonings, they all retreated to safe havens up north. We lost many of the species since, due to habitat loss, then invasive species, then urban sprawl, so how Did the coyote manage to claim the territory?



The coyote seems to be a species of opportunity. Land becomes freed from predators, they'll take it, even though it means maybe facing the same fate as the wolf. But, living along humans, I think, proved to create the intellectually stealthy creature that roams the continent today. I'm sure they stared down the barrels of hunters and settlers, and the unlucky ones that did maybe had done so for 2 reasons - they weren't the most 'sneaky' or well adapted, therefore natural selection eliminated the least adapted, or they were leading them away from their den to protect the future of their 5-9 pups. Their incredible success can also be attributed to their ability to increase their litter size in times of survival pressures, like increased hunting, when there is enough resources in the environment to support a big family of coyotes. In Essex County today, many hunters claim to be hunting the coyote for the sake of population control when there's no proof that it's needed. But biologists claim its a plan that will backfire, "As you remove coyotes from the landscape, they actually will increase their birth rates", Scott Smithers, biologist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural resources told CBC News (CBC News, 2013).

Today, the coyote almost has a ghost like aura, managing to not be seen even in plain view. Over 3 decades the western coyote adapted to living with humans in deforested habitat. To this day they are one the most 'plastic' species, adapting to almost every environment; living off scraps from human garbage, taking advantage of greenspaces kept in cities to make a home, or benefiting from fields to hide in and catch prey. They've grown to acclimate to snow and colder weather. Especially as the world grapples with climate change,

this could be the very thing that continues to encourage their expansion. The western coyote being a perfect example of how evolution forces species to reach new levels, and that no doubt is what helped lead to the creation of the coywolf, a hybrid species between Algonquin or Eastern wolves and Western coyotes.

As the the coyotes crossed the lakes and rivers that connected the two countries, they finally stepped foot into Essex County in the 1930s. In only a decade, the western coyote made its way to the territory of a distant relative. Unfortunately the numbers of the Algonquin wolf were dwindling, and to cross paths with another in the area of Algonquin park or surrounding forests was rare enough. So the Algonquin wolf decided this is how they were to pass down their genes, maybe for the best, as the coyote seems to be an adaptable species that's hard to eliminate, a feat us humans have tried to do for well over a century, and we probably won't unless we restore a well balanced ecosystem that puts pressure on food resources that the coyote consumes.