



February 21, 2019

Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair
 Senate Committee on Judiciary
 900 Court St. NE
 Salem Oregon 97301

RE: SUPPORT SB 723 -2, legislation to prohibit coyote killing contests/derbies

Dear Chairman Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned local and national conservation and animal welfare organizations, we would like to express our support for SB 723 -2 to prohibit coyote killing contests in Oregon. These events, in which participants compete to kill the heaviest or the most coyotes for the chance to win prizes, are out of step with our current understanding of the important role carnivores play in our ecosystems and is counter to sound, science-based wildlife management and Oregon’s humane values.

Killing contests are antithetical to responsible hunting ethics that encourage respect for wildlife and their habitat and discourage frivolous use of wildlife. To better reflect modern scientific understanding of natural ecosystems and to better align with the view of Oregon residents that animals—including wildlife—should be treated humanely, we respectfully urge you to support SB 723 -2 to ban coyote killing contests in the state of Oregon. We offer the following support for our request:

1. Coyote killing contests contravene modern, science-based wildlife management principles, and could damage the reputation of Oregon sportsmen and sportswomen.

Oregon’s wildlife is held and managed in the public’s trust; as such, coyote killing contests violate the spirit and tenets of responsible stewardship, sportsmanship, and respect for the public’s wildlife. Ray Powell, the former New Mexico Commissioner of State Lands, has said, “The non-specific, indiscriminate killing methods used in this commercial and unrestricted coyote killing contest are not about hunting or sound land management. These contests are about personal profit, animal cruelty. ... It is time to outlaw this highly destructive activity.”¹ Vermont’s Fish & Wildlife Department has also noted, “Coyote hunting contests are not only ineffective at controlling coyote populations, but these kinds of competitive coyote hunts are raising concerns on the part of the public and could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.”²

In late 2018 investigators with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) attended the weigh-in of the Young Farmers & Ranchers 1st Annual Coyote Hunting Tournament in Hines, Oregon, which was sponsored by the Oregon Farm Bureau. At this event, about 60 participants were vying for cash and prizes for killing the most coyotes by weight, with no limit on the number of coyotes killed. The video from the undercover investigation is [here](#).

2. The indiscriminate killing of coyotes will not reduce or mitigate conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock.

Disrupting the coyote family structure by killing individual animals, including alpha animals, may actually increase conflicts. Exploited coyote populations tend to have younger, less experienced coyotes, increased numbers of yearlings reproducing, and larger litters. For adult coyotes with dependent young, the need to feed pups provides significant motivation for coyotes to switch from killing small and medium-sized prey to killing sheep.³

Killing contests and open hunts do not target specific, problem-causing coyotes. They target coyotes in woodlands and grasslands who are keeping to themselves—not those who have become habituated to human food sources such as unsecured garbage, pet food, or livestock carcasses (left by humans). Prevention—not lethal control—is the best method for minimizing conflicts with coyotes.⁴ Eliminating access to easy food sources, such as bird seed and garbage, supervising dogs while outside, and keeping cats indoors reduces conflicts with pets and humans. Practicing good animal husbandry and using strategic nonlethal predator control methods to protect livestock (such as electric fences, guard animals, and removing dead livestock) are more effective than lethal control in addressing coyote-human conflicts.⁵

A recent issue of *Oregon Small Farm News* highlighted research finding that lethal control of coyotes only increased livestock losses, and that coyotes with no record of livestock depredation, and who have established themselves in a territory that overlaps with sheep pastures, can actually *prevent* livestock losses by excluding coyotes from neighboring packs who may have learned to kill sheep.⁶

3. The mass killing of coyotes in these contests will not protect native wildlife or increase game populations.

In response to concerns from hunters that wild carnivores may be diminishing populations of small game animals, the Pennsylvania Game Commission issued the following statement in 2016:⁷

“During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Game Commission focused much of its energy and resources into predator control efforts. During this period, we did not understand the relationship between predators and prey. **After decades of using predator control (such as paying bounties) with no effect, and the emergence of wildlife management as a science, the agency finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work.** . . . To truly serve sportsmen, we must focus on proven means to restore small game hunting. And we do this by improving the habitat. . . . You can’t manage wildlife based on what makes intuitive sense, or based on anecdotal information. . . .

Practices such as forestry and farming dictate the abundance of small game, not predators. **To pretend that predator control can return small game hunting to the state is a false prophecy. . . . [Predators] don’t compete with our hunters for game. The limiting factor is habitat – we must focus our efforts on habitat.**” (Emphasis added.)

The best available science demonstrates that killing wild carnivores to increase ungulate populations is unlikely to produce positive results because the key to ungulate survival is protecting breeding females and access to adequate nutrition, not predation.

Comprehensive studies, including those conducted in Colorado and Idaho, show that killing wild carnivores fails to increase deer numbers.⁸ In recommending against a year-round hunting season on coyotes, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation based their decision in part on the fact that “random removal of

coyotes resulting from a year-round hunting season will not: (a) control or reduce coyote populations; (b) reduce or eliminate predation on livestock; or (c) result in an increase in deer densities.”⁹

Additionally, we have attached a letter from Project Coyote to the Georgia DNR about a similar contest, signed by more than 50 scientists, which refutes the claims that wildlife killing contests targeting predators are an effective way to manage predator populations. Using peer-reviewed science, that letter showed there is no scientific evidence that supports the notion that the mass and indiscriminate killing of predators in killing contests reduces livestock losses, boosts ungulate populations or effectively reduces coyote populations.

4. Lethal control of coyotes ultimately leads to an increase in their population.

The evidence is clear: More than 100 years of coyote killing has not reduced their populations. In fact, since 1850 when mass killings of coyotes began, the range of this species has tripled in the United States.¹⁰ Indiscriminate killing of coyotes can stimulate increases in their populations. Persecution of coyotes disrupts their social structure, which, ironically, encourages more breeding and migration, and ultimately results in more coyotes.¹¹ The alpha pair in a pack of coyotes is normally the only one that reproduces. When one or both members of the alpha pair are killed, other pairs will form and reproduce. At the same time, lone coyotes will move in to mate, young coyotes will start having offspring sooner, and pup survival may increase.¹² While widespread killing may temporarily reduce coyote numbers in a given area, coyotes bounce back quickly, even when up to 70 percent of their numbers are removed.¹³ It’s impossible to completely eradicate coyotes from an area.¹⁴ New coyotes will quickly replace vacant territorial niches where coyotes who have been removed. Coyote pairs hold territories, which leaves single coyotes (“floaters”) continually looking for new places to call home.¹⁵

5. Killing coyotes negatively impacts sensitive ecosystems.

Coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems, providing a number of free, natural ecological services.¹⁶ For example, coyotes help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, curtailing hantavirus, a rodent-borne illness that kills humans. In addition, coyotes clean up carrion (animal carcasses), increase biodiversity, remove sick animals from the gene pool, and disperse seeds. Coyotes balance their ecosystems and have trophic cascade effects such as indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores and increasing the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.¹⁷

6. Indiscriminately killing large numbers of coyotes is fundamentally inhumane

Contests that encourage the indiscriminate killing of large numbers of animals are deeply at odds with the humane values of Oregonians. People from all parts of our state support the idea that deliberate cruelty toward animals is unethical and wrong. Motivated by the financial rewards of killing the heaviest coyotes, it is unlikely participants will abide by the rules and values embraced by ethical sportsmen. The enthusiasm for the mass killing of animals is likely to be viewed as barbaric, sadistic, cruel, and wasteful by the majority of Oregonians, and could gravely taint the image of the organizations, institutions, and businesses that support them.

- Mike Finley, chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, said recently to *High Country News* that “if he could he would add Oregon to the list of states outlawing predator-killing derbies,” and referred to those contests as “slaughter fests” and “stomach-turning examples of wanton waste.”
- Retired wildlife biologist Jim Posewitz, a member of the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame and author of the book *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting*, has said, “Competitive killing seems to lack the appreciation of and the respect for wildlife fundamental to any current definition of an ethical hunter.”

7. Conclusion

Scientific evidence does not support the notion that indiscriminately killing coyotes will diminish coyote populations, increase game populations, or reduce conflicts with people, pets, or livestock. Indeed, lethal control of coyotes may likely lead to more coyotes and more conflicts.

There is no noble purpose in killing contests. While blood sports such as cockfighting and dogfighting have been condemned in Oregon and throughout the country as barbaric and cruel, wildlife killing contests are allowed to continue in Oregon. Killing animals for prizes is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of coyotes and of natural ecosystems. As we learn more about coyotes, and as the public's perception of the way animals should be treated continues to evolve, the general public will not tolerate activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable. Killing contests have no place in modern, science-based wildlife management and run counter to the thoughtful stewardship and the humane values of the vast majority of Oregonians.

In fact, a new poll by the Remington Research Group underscores those values, with more than three fourths of Oregonians who were polled agreeing that native carnivores like coyotes play a vital role in Oregon's ecosystems, and a strong majority of those polled saying they support legislation to ban wildlife-killing contests.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

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CC: Curt Melcher, Director, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Doug Cottam, Wildlife Division Administrator, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Amira Streeter, Governor's Natural Resources Policy Advisor
Jason Miner, Governor's Natural Resources Policy Manager

Attached: Report on Young Farmers & Ranchers Coyote Hunting Tournament
Article from *Oregon Small Farm News*
Letter from scientists in opposition to wildlife killing contests
Remington Research Group Oregon Public Opinion Poll

¹ Powell, Ray: Letter to Mark Chavez, owner of Gunhawk Firearms, November 15, 2012.

² "Eastern Coyote Issues – A Closer Look," Vermont Fish & Wildlife, January 2017 at www.vtfishandwildlife.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_73079/File/Hunt/trapping/Eastern-Coyote-Position-Statement.pdf

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- ⁷ Frye, Bob. (July 25, 2016). "Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations," *Trib Live*, <http://triblive.com/sports/outdoors/10756490-74/game-predator-predators>.
- ⁸ Bishop, C. J., G. C. White, D. J. Freddy, B. E. Watkins, and T. R. Stephenson. 2009. Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-28; Hurlley, M. A., J. W. Unsworth, P. Zager, M. Hebblewhite, E. O. Garton, D. M. Montgomery, J. R. Skalski, and C. L. Maycock. 2011. Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-33.; Forrester, T. D. and H. U. Wittmer. 2013. A review of the population dynamics of mule deer and black-tailed deer *Odocoileus hemionus* in North America. *Mammal Review* 43:292-308.; Monteith, K. L., V. C. Bleich, T. R. Stephenson, B. M. Pierce, M. M. Conner, J. G. Kie, and R. T. Bowyer. 2014. Life-history characteristics of mule deer: Effects of nutrition in a variable environment. *Wildlife Monographs* 186:1-62.
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