



Animal Welfare Institute

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Testimony in Support HB293 / SB200

Natural Resources – Organized Killing Contests – Restriction

The Animal Welfare Institute, on behalf of its members and constituents in Maryland, encourages support for HB293/SB200. This legislation would make it unlawful for any person to sponsor, conduct, or participate in organized contests to kill coyote, fox, or raccoon for prizes or monetary awards, with violations punishable by a fine. Wildlife killing contests are organized events in which participants kill animals within a certain timeframe for entertainment, prizes, cash, or other inducements. Teams compete in judging categories that often focus on the number of animals killed, the weight or the sex of animals killed, the particular species killed, or the smallest or largest body or body part of the animal killed. Afterwards, the carcasses of the animals are usually dumped away from public view. Contests in Maryland predominantly target native carnivores, and these events can result in hundreds of animals being wiped off a landscape in a single weekend. Wildlife-killing contests have no place in a civil society or in modern wildlife management. Such contests are antithetical to the conservation ethic that is necessary to ensure the long-term protection of Maryland’s wildlife heritage. Maryland should join other states in banning wildlife killing contests for the following reasons:

1. Wildlife killing contests are cruel and contravene hunting principles.

Wildlife killing contests violate fundamental hunting principles, and the majority of Maryland residents are likely to view enthusiasm for the mass killing of animals as barbaric, cruel, and wasteful, which could gravely taint the image of sportsmen and sportswomen and of hunting in general. In killing contests, the carcasses of the animals are usually wasted, and the principles of fair chase are frequently disregarded, with participants using bait and electronic calling devices to attract animals with sounds that mimic prey or distress calls of wounded young. Investigative video footage has shown contest participants joking about the methods used to lure and kill the animals, and laughing and posing for photos in front of piles of dead animals.¹ Such behavior demonstrates a complete lack of respect for wildlife, promotes gratuitous violence, and sends the irresponsible and disturbing message that wanton killing is fun. Furthermore, an untold number of animals are orphaned or injured during these events. Killing adult animals inevitably leaves dependent young to die from thirst, starvation, predation, or exposure.

Numerous state agencies and officials have stated that killing contests undermine the reputation of sportsmen and sportswomen and damage the tradition of hunting:

¹ Humane Society of the United States, Undercover Video Takes Viewers into Grisly World of Wildlife Killing Contests, May 3, 2018. Available at” <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2018/05/undercover-video-takes-viewers-into-grisly-world-of-wildlife-killing-contests.html>.

- Mike Finley, chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission stated: “[k]illing large numbers of predators as part of an organized contest or competition is inconsistent with sound, science-based wildlife management and antithetical to the concepts of sportsmanship and fair chase.”² He also called the contests “slaughter fests” and “stomach-turning examples of wanton waste.”³
- Ted Chu, former wildlife manager with Idaho Fish and Game stated: “Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest animals.”⁴
- Dan Gibbs, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, said: “For me, hunting contests don’t sit well. As a sportsman, I’d never participate in one personally . . . wildlife killing contests give sportsmen and sportswomen a bad name and damage our reputation.”⁵
- The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated: “Wildlife predator/fur-bearing hunting contest[s] that link economic gain to the greatest number or variety of animals killed are contrary to the important principle that the take of wildlife should not be allowed to go to waste or taken for economic gain.”⁶
- 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.”⁷
- New Mexico State Senator Moores, who sponsored a bill to ban killing contests, stated: “Killing contests are just blood sports. All they are about is killing as many animals as you can, and not about protecting livestock or property celebrating mass killing is just not good wildlife management.”⁸
- The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department has stated that killing contests “could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.”⁹
- The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has also found: “public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting and undermine public support for hunting in general[,]” which prompted a rulemaking to “address public concerns that

² Testimony by Mike Finley to the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee, March 18, 2019.

³ Todd Wilkinson, *A Death of Ethics: is hunting destroying itself?*, Mountain Journal, Dec. 12, 2018.

⁴ Todd Wilkinson, *Shoot biggest wolf, win trophy and cash*, Jackson Hole News & Guide, Dec. 18, 2013.

⁵ Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting, Apr. 30, 2020.

⁶ Arizona Game and Fish Commission, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Title 12. Natural Resources Chapter 4. .

⁷ Ray Powell, Letter to Mark Chavez, owner of Gunhawk Firearms, Nov. 15, 2012.

⁸ Center for Biological Diversity Press Release.

⁹ Vermont Fish & Wildlife, Eastern Coyote Issues – A Closer Look (Jan. 2017).

certain hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminant killing of wildlife[.]”¹⁰

2. Wildlife killing contests undermine modern, science-based wildlife management principles and are not an effective wildlife management tool.

The indiscriminate killing promoted by wildlife killing contests is counterproductive to effective wildlife population management. Scientific studies have shown that many wildlife populations depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly due to the sudden drop in competition for resources and changes to social structure from the loss of individuals.¹¹ This effect is well documented for coyote populations in particular, one of the species protected by this legislation. The indiscriminate killing of coyotes increases their populations over time because it disrupts their social structure, which encourages higher levels of breeding and migration.¹² State wildlife management agencies in 16 states have recognized that killing contests do not control coyote population size.¹³

Killing large number of coyotes negatively impacts the environment because coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems.¹⁴ Coyotes help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, consume carrion, remove sick animals from the gene pool, disperse seeds, protect ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores, and increase the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.¹⁵

3. Wildlife killing contests do not increase populations of game animals.

The best available science indicates that indiscriminately killing native carnivores is not an effective method for increasing game species abundance. Rather, the most important management tool to increase game species is to decrease harvest of female ungulates,¹⁶ followed

¹⁰ Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Public Hearing Notice on Draft Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Regulations at 321 CMR 2.00 and 3.02.

¹¹ F. F. Knowlton, et al., *Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management*, 52 *Journal of Range Management* 398, 400-402 (1999). Robert Crabtree and Jennifer Sheldon, *Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone*, in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience* (T. Clark et al., eds, 1999); J. M. Goodrich and S. W. Buskirk, *Control of Abundant Native Vertebrates for Conservation of Endangered Species*, 9 *Conservation Biology* (1995); Elizabeth Kierepka, et al., *Effect of Compensatory Immigration on the Genetic Structure of Coyotes*, 81 *J. Wildlife Mgmt* 1394, 1394 (2017).

¹² *Id.*; see also S.D. Gehrt, *Chicago Coyotes part II*, 11 *Wildlife Control Technologies* 20-21, 38-9, 42 (2004).

¹³ The 16 states are New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, North Carolina, Florida, Washington, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

¹⁴ Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore* 9 (2005).

¹⁵ S. E. Henke and F. C. Bryant, *Effects of Coyote Removal on the Faunal Community in Western Texas*, 63 *Journal of Wildlife Management* 1066 (1999); K. R. Crooks and M. E. Soule, *Mesopredator Release and Avifaunal Extinctions in a Fragmented System*, 400 *Nature* 563 (1999); E. T. Mezquida, et al., *Sage-Grouse and Indirect Interactions: Potential Implications of Coyote Control on Sage-Grouse Populations*, 108 *Condor* 747 (2006); N. M. Waser et al., *Coyotes, Deer, and Wildflowers: Diverse Evidence Points to a Trophic Cascade*, 101 *Naturwissenschaften* 427 (2014).

¹⁶ C.A. DeYoung, *Population dynamics, in Biology and Management of Whitetailed Deer* 147 (D. G. Hewitt, ed. 2011); J.C. Kilgo, et al, *Coyote removal, understory cover, and survival of white-tailed deer neonates*, 78 *J. Wildlife Mgmt.* 1261 (2014); North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, *Evaluation of Deer Hunting Seasons and Structures and Deer Management Units in North Carolina* (2015).

by protection of habitat.¹⁷ Considering that science, many state commissions and agencies, including those in New York, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming, have concluded that reducing predator numbers will not enhance populations of ungulates, small game animals, and game birds. These findings demonstrate that this common rationale for holding killing contests that target predators is scientifically unfounded.

4. Seven states have banned wildlife killing contests.

Maryland should be a leader on this issue by joining the seven states that have enacted bans on wildlife killing contests targeting certain species. These seven states include Massachusetts, Vermont, Colorado, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Washington. Five additional states, including Oregon, New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, either have currently pending legislation, or have had legislation introduced at some point in the past, that would ban wildlife killing contests. Maryland should align itself with this positive trend in science-based wildlife management.

Conclusion

Wildlife killing contests have no place in a civil society or in modern wildlife management. Such contests are antithetical to the respectful, ethical, and pro-conservation message necessary to ensure the long-term protection of Maryland's wildlife heritage. If you have any questions or if there is any additional information we can provide, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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¹⁷ C.J. Bishop, et al., *Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change*, 172 Wildlife Monographs 1 (2009). Hurley, M. A., et al., *Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho*, 178 Wildlife Monographs 1 (2011).; T.D. Forrester and H. U. Wittmer, *A review of the population dynamics of mule deer and black-tailed deer *Odocoileus hemionus* in North America*, 43 Mammal Review 292 (2013); K.L. Monteith, et al., *Life-history characteristics of mule deer: Effects of nutrition in a variable environment*, 186 Wildlife Monographs 1 (2014).