



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Bill: HB 293/SB 200 to prohibit wildlife killing contests
Position: Support
Date: January 15, 2021

Chair Barve and Members of the Committee: [Chair Pinsky and Members of the Committee]

My name is Stephanie Boyles Griffin, I'm a Maryland resident and the senior scientist in the Wildlife Protection department at the Humane Society of the United States. I support House Bill 293/Senate Bill 200 because wildlife killing contests are an affront to science-based wildlife management principles.

Scientific studies have shown that the indiscriminate killing of coyotes, such as in wildlife killing contests, disrupts their social structure and encourages more breeding and migration, which ultimately results in more coyotes.¹ If they are left alone, coyotes will instead limit their own numbers according to available habitat and prey. Here in the Northeastern U.S., coyotes are filling a crucial niche after the eradication of the region's original top carnivores – wolves and cougars. Like all wildlife species, coyotes play an integral role in healthy ecosystems. They keep prey populations in check and increase the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.²

A recent study confirmed that coyotes are not reducing deer populations in the Northeastern U.S.³ And indiscriminately killing coyotes will not increase the overall abundance of deer for human hunters. The Pennsylvania Game Commission states, "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," and adds that, instead, the limiting factor for deer is the availability of good habitat.⁴ Sportsmen's organizations like Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Izaak Walton League of America have expressed opposition to predator control.⁵

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's new Coyote Management Plan, which was developed using a large body of scientific and peer-reviewed literature, concludes that indiscriminate, lethal control of coyotes is ineffective at addressing livestock depredation.⁶ Furthermore, USDA data indicate that confirmed livestock losses to wild carnivores are minuscule, and that the predominant sources of mortality to livestock, by far, are non-carnivore causes including disease, illness, birthing problems, and weather.⁷ Here in Maryland, it is difficult to find any state or federal statistics showing that coyotes are a significant threat to livestock.⁸ The Maryland DNR states on its website that "...coyotes do not seem to be a major cause of agricultural loss in the state."⁹

When it comes to protecting livestock, prevention is more effective than lethal control, including practicing good animal husbandry, removing dead livestock that are attractants, and the use of electric fences, visual and noise deterrents, and guard animals.¹⁰ However, this legislation would not affect the ability of Maryland landowners to kill predating animals on their property, to obtain a state permit to control predating animals, or to contract with licensed wildlife damage control operators on their property. HB 293/SB 200 would prohibit *only* the cruel, unsporting, and pointless contests that offer cash prizes for killing the most, the heaviest, or even the smallest animals. As I've outlined here, such contests achieve no quantifiable, science-based wildlife management objectives.

As a Maryland citizen who cares about protecting our wildlife from pointless cruelty, and as a biologist who understands the importance of managing our wildlife according to the best available science, I respectfully ask this committee to support this legislation. Thank you so much for your time.

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- ¹ F. F. Knowlton, E. M. Gese, and M. M. Jaeger, Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management, *Journal of Range Management* 52, no. 5 (1999); Robert Crabtree and Jennifer Sheldon, Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone, in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience*, ed. T. Clark et al. (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1999); J. M. Goodrich and S. W. Buskirk, Control of Abundant Native Vertebrates for Conservation of Endangered Species, *Conservation Biology* 9, no. 6 (1995); S.D. Gehrt. 2004. Chicago Coyotes part II. *Wildlife Control Technologies* 11(4):20-21, 38-9, 42 and F.F. Knowlton. 1972. Preliminary interpretations of coyote population mechanics with some management implications. *J. Wildlife Management*. 36:369-382.
- ² Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis. 2005. *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*. Animal Protection Institute, Sacramento, California; S. E. Henke and F. C. Bryant, "Effects of Coyote Removal on the Faunal Community in Western Texas," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 63, no. 4 (1999); K. R. Crooks and M. E. Soule, "Mesopredator Release and Avifaunal Extinctions in a Fragmented System," *Nature* 400, no. 6744 (1999); E. T. Mezquida, S. J. Slater, and C. W. Benkman, "Sage-Grouse and Indirect Interactions: Potential Implications of Coyote Control on Sage-Grouse Populations," *Condor* 108, no. 4 (2006); N. M. Waser et al., "Coyotes, Deer, and Wildflowers: Diverse Evidence Points to a Trophic Cascade," *Naturwissenschaften* 101, no. 5 (2014).
- ³ Eugenia V. Bragina, Roland Kays, Allison Hody, Christopher E. Moorman, Christopher S. Deperno, L. Scott Mills. "Effects on white-tailed deer following eastern coyote colonization." *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, March 20, 2019.
- ⁴ B. Frye. (July 25, 2016). "Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations," *Trib Live*, <http://triblive.com/sports/outdoors/10756490-74/game-predator-predators>.
- ⁵ Ducks Unlimited: "Predator control cannot result in meaningful increases in duck numbers or birds in the bag and threatens to undermine the broad coalition of public support on which modern waterfowl conservation depends." In Chuck Petrie: "Prairies Under Siege: Ducks, Habitat Conservation & Predators," in the November/December 2003 issue of *Ducks Unlimited* magazine at www.ducks.org/conservation/where-ducks-unlimited-works/prairie-pothole-region/prairies-under-siege-ducks-habitat-conservation-predators; "Removing a random predator from the landscape has no impact whatsoever on widespread turkey populations...Without good nesting habitat, eggs and poults are simply more vulnerable. Turkeys evolved to cope with predators. As long as they have a place to hide their nests and raise their young, they'll do just fine without predator control." In the National Wild Turkey Federation article "Coexist with Predators" at www.nwtf.org/conservation/article/coexist-predators; The Izaak Walton League of America: "The League recognizes the intrinsic value of predatory species and their important ecological roles. ... There is no justification for widespread destruction of animals classified as predators ... The League opposes payment of bounties on predators or varmints." In "Conservation Policies 2019," pg. 54 at www.iwla.org/docs/default-source/about-iwla/2019-policy-book.pdf?sfvrsn=44
- ⁶ Coyote Management Plan. (Mar. 1, 2018). North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission at https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Species/Coyote%20Management%20Plan_FINAL_030118.pdf.
- ⁷ For an in-depth discussion, see: Wendy Keefover, "Northern Rocky Mountain Wolves: A Public Policy Process Failure: How Two Special Interest Groups Hijacked Wolf Conservation in America," *WildEarth Guardians* www.wildearthguardians.org/site/DocServer/Wolf_Report_20120503.pdf 1, no. 1 (2012).
- ⁸ The Maryland DNR Wildlife and Heritage Service: "Wildlife Damage to Agricultural Interests in Maryland" at https://mda.maryland.gov/about_mda/Documents/wildlifedamageag.pdf
- ⁹ The Maryland DNR: Coyotes in Maryland at https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/hunt_trap/coyote.aspx
- ¹⁰ Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst*; Adrian Treves et al., "Forecasting Environmental Hazards and the Application of Risk Maps to Predator Attacks on Livestock," *BioScience* 61, no. 6 (2011); Philip J. Baker et al., "Terrestrial Carnivores and Human Food Production: Impact and Management," *Mammal Review* 38, (2008); A. Treves and K. U. Karanth, "Human-Carnivore Conflict and Perspectives on Carnivore Management Worldwide," *Conservation Biology* 17, no. 6 (2003); J. A. Shivik, A. Treves, and P. Callahan, "Nonlethal Techniques for Managing Predation: Primary and Secondary Repellents," *Conservation Biology* 17, no. 6 (2003); N. J. Lance et al., "Biological, Technical, and Social Aspects of Applying Electrified Fladry for Livestock Protection from Wolves (*Canis Lupus*)," *Wildlife Research* 37, no. 8 (2010); Andrea Morehouse and Mark Boyce, "From Venison to Beef: Seasonal Changes in Wolf Diet Composition in a Livestock Grazing Environment," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 9, no. 8 (2011).