

Testimony for LD 1239 An Act To Prohibit Coyote-killing Contests in Maine
Submitted by Bonnie Sammons, Belgrade, Maine

As a science educator, Maine Guide, Master Gardener, Maine Master Naturalist and wildlife field research technician I've learned from different perspectives the importance of coyotes as a keystone species.

Their role as top carnivores is vital to maintaining nature's balance and biodiversity. Their presence keeps herbivores like deer on the move. This protects habitat of songbirds and numerous other species; and prevents deer from devouring crops and spreading disease to livestock. Coyotes control rodent populations and weed out weak or sick deer. Healthy deer aren't often prey to coyotes, nor are farm animals.

Considering the benefits of these animals, I had questions about killing contests: **Who** is involved? **What** do hunters think of them? **What** is the wildlife management benefit? **When** and **where** do they happen? **How** are ethical hunting rules involved? **How** many animals are killed? Finally: **-Why** are there coyote killing contests?

Here are a few things that I found out:

1. Killing contests still exist in many states. But there is growing awareness and opposition. Ten states have banned or restricted them. 70-80% of those surveyed *oppose* them.
2. Because of this opposition, The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department states that killing contests "could jeopardize the future of hunting and affect hunters' access to private lands."
3. There is no scientific evidence that killing contests serve any wildlife management purposes or that they protect livestock. *When coyotes are able to thrive in the wild* and when good animal husbandry practices are in use, livestock are not coyote's favored prey. Further, indiscriminate killing results in damaged social structures, earlier reproduction, bigger litters and likely more so called "problem" coyotes - who then may resort to seeking prey in our yards and pastures.
4. Many wildlife management professionals and hunters oppose wildlife killing contests. I am submitting their statements today. (attached)
5. Finally - why? Some reasons cited are to improve or show off hunting skills and win prize money, bond with friends or carry on traditions; or that coyotes are a threat to humans, livestock or pets.

A FACEBOOK Page about a recent contest suggests another motivation. Graphic video footage during and after the killing shows gleeful participants talking - *in vivid detail* - about their kills. For some, killing coyotes is just plain fun.

Do any of these motivations justify the purposeless slaughter of coyotes?

These contests are unethical. They damage the balance of ecosystems. They encourage lack of respect for wildlife and give hunters a bad name. Continuing these events goes against any humane, ethical "wildlife management" practice.

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1239. Thank you.

There are countless sources on this subject. Here are a few of the ones that I consulted

https://www.humaneworld.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS_Statements-wildlife-killing-contests.pdf

<https://www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2024/Fall/Conservation/Predator-Killing-Contests>

<https://projectcoyote.org/protect/ending-wildlife-killing-contests/>

<https://wildlifeforall.us/truth-about-wildlife-killing-contests/>

Wildlife management professionals and hunters on wildlife killing contests and predator control

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Statements on wildlife killing contests

Arizona Game & Fish Commission: “Extensive public controversy exists about predator/fur-bearing contests that award prizes to participants who kill the largest number or variety of predator/fur-bearing animals or the contest is based on the combined weight of animals a participant kills. To the extent these contests reflect on the overall hunting community, public outrage with these events has the potential to threaten hunting as a legitimate wildlife management function.”¹

Jim Zieler, hunter and chair of the Arizona Game & Fish Commission: “There has been a lot of social outcry against this, and you can kind of understand why. It’s difficult to stand up and defend a practice like this. It’s just not enough to say, ‘Science will tell us it doesn’t have a significant impact on the predator population.’”²

Michael Sutton, hunter and former president of California Fish and Game Commission: “Awarding prizes for wildlife killing contests is both unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of natural systems. Such contests are an anachronism and have no place in modern wildlife management.”³

Colorado Parks & Wildlife: “Hunting contest for these species are not necessary to provide an adequate, flexible and coordinated statewide system of wildlife management, or to maintain adequate and proper populations of wildlife species, nor are hunting contest for these species necessary to protect, preserve, enhance and manage wildlife for the use, benefit, or enjoyment of the state or its visitors. So for those reasons staff is proposing this recommendation.”⁴

Dan Gibbs, hunter and executive director of Colorado Department of Natural Resources: “For me, hunting contests don’t sit well. As a sportsman I’d never participate in one personally. Hunting is an important reverent tradition in Colorado and powerful management tool but I also think wildlife killing contests give sportsmen and sportswomen a bad name and damage our reputation.”⁵

Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources: “[There is a] misconception that predator killing contests provide benefits to the public and other wildlife species.”⁶ The agency found “no scientific evidence to support claims that predator hunting contests reduce predator numbers, reduce livestock damage, or increase populations of game species (possible exception on heavily hunted individual farms).”⁷ It stated “the primary concern of staff is [the] possible negative effects on public views of hunting in general.”⁸ It further stated that “social media posts contribute to poor public image” because “photos and inappropriate social media posts negatively affect [the] public’s view of hunting in general.”⁹ It also noted that “motivation for hunting affects public support” and that there is “no data specific to contest hunting, but expected public support would be less than for trophy hunting.”¹⁰ It pointed to a National Shooting Sports Foundation 2019 survey which found that only 29% of Americans support hunting for a trophy.¹¹ Finally, DWR staff “have concerns related to the spread of tapeworm” by these contests.¹²

Vermont Fish & Wildlife: “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.”¹³ The department has also stated, “Although these activities follow laws and regulations, we do not believe such short-term hunts will have any measurable impact on regulating coyote populations, nor will they bolster populations of deer or other game species.”¹⁴

Kelly Susewind, director of Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife: “[P]art of my job, and frankly part of my soul, is to promote hunting, to get our youth hunting, to really have this be a core piece of what our society supports. And frankly, that job is a lot harder if we’re condoning these types of contests, and for that reason, I personally support this language.”¹⁵

Tony Wasley, hunter and director of Nevada Department of Wildlife: “I just want to clarify that contests are not threatening coyote populations, nor are they in and of themselves saving mule deer or other game populations . . . nor do they save the agency any appreciable amount of money.” Discussing NDOW’s proposed regulation to ban contests, Wasley explained, “It proposes no change on an individual’s right or ability to gather, call or kill coyotes.” He went on to say, “Killing contests are ethically upsetting by virtue for most members of society. Hunting should not be a competition as such behavior ultimately degrades the value of life and undermines respect for the animals being hunted. . . . The North American Model that we often prop up as the anchor of modern wildlife management disapproves of, I quote, ‘frivolous killing.’ . . . In my ethics as a hunter I hope to defend a deeper and more profound sense of hunting than what I fear coyote contests say to the general public about hunters and our ethics. Hunters need to be conscious of the public image we project and the way in which the public perceives us.” Pointing out that “hunters are in the extreme minority of citizens,” Wasley stated, “our actions must be with the awareness of our broader societal irrelevance.” He concluded, “Really what my biggest fear around this issue is for the future, for the future of conservation, for the way that we as ethical sportsmen and women are viewed by a changing society and the consequences on a whole host of other activities. . . . [M]y fear as a sportsman and my fear as the director of the Department of Wildlife is an unwillingness to consider what society at large feels about a certain activity will hasten the erosion of privileges that I hold near and dear.”¹⁶

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (MassWildlife): “Further, recognizing that public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting and undermine public support for hunting in general, MassWildlife recommended the following regulatory changes: Prohibit hunting contests for predators and furbearers; Prohibit “wanton waste” of game animals taken during regulated hunting and trapping seasons; Change harvest reporting requirements for fox and coyote to be reported within 48 hours, consistent with current reporting requirements for deer, turkey, and bear.”¹⁷ It went on to state, “These regulations: do not reduce opportunity for hunting coyotes or other furbearers;

fulfill one of MassWildlife's core functions to develop and maintain hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities in Massachusetts; address public concern that certain contests contribute to the waste of animals; recognize and address that public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting; discourage the waste of wildlife and reinforces a core principle and expectation that all animals taken during the regulated seasons are utilized to the greatest extent possible, as taught in Hunter Education; recognize that coyotes and other furbearers are managed as a valuable natural resource."¹⁸

Idaho Fish and Game: "Fish and Game does not support contests or bounties on predators, that portray hunting in an unethical light, devalue the predator and may be offensive to the public."¹⁹

Ray Powell, former New Mexico Commissioner of State Lands: "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."²⁰

Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners: "[T]he wildlife management profession does not generally recognize the use of contests as a tool with substantial wildlife management effect."²¹

New Mexico Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard: "These are not hunting contests. They are animal cruelty contests. It is an inexcusable practice, and today I used my authority to ban organized killing contests of unprotected species on any of the nine million acres of State Trust Land that I am charged with overseeing."²²

Mike Finley, hunter and former chair of Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission: "Killing 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."²³ Finley has also called the events "slaughter fests" and "stomach-turning examples of wanton waste."²⁴

Commissioner Brad Smith, Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission: "I am a hunter, I'll clarify that, and I've never perceived hunting as a contest. I think these are not hunting contests, they're killing contests." He went on to state that, "I'm concerned about the demise of the hunting tradition, I'm concerned about the demise of the number of youth going into hunting and fishing. ... What is going to help that number go down even faster and further is the image of a pile of dead critters out there. ... This is a case of, we are actually shooting ourselves in the foot to allow that sort of thing."²⁵

Commissioner Molly Linville, rancher and member of Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission: "So what we find personally on our ranch is that we always know when these contests are going on because people are zooming up and down our road and shooting into our agricultural fields and trespassing during these contests. The reason the coyotes are in our agricultural field is because they are eating gophers. And I always say they are our only free employees—they're our only employees—on the ranch. We have livestock guardian dogs that we feel have created a very comfortable stasis of, you know, everyone sort of knows their place. That gets really disrupted when people come and kill coyotes on this place."²⁶

Ted Chu, hunter and former wildlife manager with Idaho Fish and Game: "Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest animals."²⁷

Eric Nuse, former executive director of the International Hunter Education Association: "We don't like anything that smacks of commercialization with money or prizes. Anything that doesn't honor the

animals grates on us and seems inherently wrong. These contests create very poor PR for hunters.”²⁸

Head of Information and Education Marion Larson, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife:

“The contest is being offered by a private business, it has nothing to do with managing wildlife...I do want to make it clear, coyote contests are not a management tool by any stretch of the imagination.”²⁹

The late Jim Posewitz, retired biologist with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and author of *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting* and *Inherit the Hunt: A Journey into American Hunting*: “Competitive killing seems to lack the appreciation of and the respect for wildlife fundamental to any current definition of an ethical hunter.”³⁰

Mike Phillips, hunter, wolf biologist, and Montana state senator: “Predator-killing contests are abominations, an insult to the history of life on this planet. . . . If you are going to remove wolves or coyotes because there are identifiable problems, okay, do it if it’s necessary, but be strategic. Predator killing contests turn that on its head. When is needless, thoughtless killing ever justified? . . . Are these contests indicative of the values we want to be emulating for our kids?”³¹

Commissioner Barbara Baker, Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission: “[T]he crux of the issue, at least to me, is whether the practice of permitting killing of a public trust for its own sake, just to kill, to win a game, fits within the values of which we operate. We each have to make that decision for ourselves, but the touchstone for that is the North American Model of Wildlife Management, and it’s pretty clear that wildlife may only be killed for a legitimate, non-frivolous purpose. So again, that’s another thing that we each have to decide for ourselves, but to me it is real clear that killing for a game, or killing to win money, is the definition of frivolous.”³²

The Wildlife Society:

- “6. Recognize that there is little evidence to support the use of killing contests for controlling predator populations. 7. Recognize that while species killed in contests can be legally killed in most states, making a contest of it may undermine the public’s view of ethical hunting.”³³
- “In some cases, particularly for predators, justification for the killing contests is often based on flawed use of science. For example, coyote killing contests are often justified on the basis that coyotes kill deer or other game; however, that fails to recognize that predation is a proximal cause of mortality, but not necessarily the ultimate cause that limits a species’ population.”³⁴
- “Killing contests differ from typical regulated hunting by the very nature of the organized public competition and prizes being given specifically for killing the largest, smallest, or most animals. “Big Buck” pools or organized record books differ from killing contests because the animals recognized in these competitions are harvested consistent with ordinary and generally accepted hunting practices and then introduced to the competition.”³⁵

Statements on the ineffective and counterproductive nature of coyote population control

Arizona Game and Fish Department: “Removing coyotes from one area generally results in other coyotes moving in from surrounding areas and breeding faster.”³⁶

Colorado Parks and Wildlife:

- “Many eradication programs have been attempted in other North American cities and all have proven expensive failures. Even the best eradication efforts cannot remove all the coyotes and research has proven such eradication will cause the remaining coyotes to increase reproduction, creating larger litters. Thus, removal programs lead to increased reproduction by the remaining