



Wildlife Killing Contests

A guide to ending the blood sport
in your community



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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How to use this guide

WHILE BLOOD SPORTS SUCH AS DOGFIGHTING AND COCK-FIGHTING ARE RECOGNIZED AS SERIOUS CRIMES across the nation, a little-known activity—the wildlife killing contest—is still legal in almost every state.

THE PUBLIC HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY AWARE of the plight of animals killed and injured in wildlife killing contests.

A growing number of citizens are calling on their communities and states to pass laws banning this cruel blood sport. As of September 2020, seven states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests. This guide will help YOU make a difference! There are three main ways to target wildlife killing contests in your community and state:

1. Raising public awareness
2. Shutting down individual wildlife killing contests
3. Passing laws to ban wildlife killing contests

LEARN THE ISSUE: To help familiarize you with the issue, this guide provides an overview of killing contests and what’s being done to stop them.

GATHER INFORMATION: This guide provides a list of questions to ask yourself regarding wildlife killing contests in your community and includes advice on reaching out to the HSUS for help, building a coalition and researching the opposition.

“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.”

— *Michael Sutton, former president, California Fish and Game Commission*

TAKE ACTION: This section of the guide provides an overview of the three main methods for combating wildlife killing contests: raising public awareness, shutting down individual contests and passing laws or regulations that ban wildlife killing contests.

SAMPLE DOCUMENTS: Please use the sample documents we’ve provided and adapt them to the issues in your community. We’ve included sample letters to the editor, opinion articles, letters to event sponsors and hosts, tweets, Facebook posts, sharegraphics, fact sheets, testimony and letters to lawmakers. Because coyotes are the most common victims in wildlife killing contests, we’ve included sample documents for coyote killing contests as well as general wildlife killing contests that you can adapt for whatever species is the target of events near you.

For assistance, contact wildlife@humansociety.org.

Learn the issue

WHAT ARE WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS? Wildlife killing contests are organized events in which participants compete for prizes—typically cash or guns—to see who can kill the greatest number or the largest or smallest animals within a certain time period. Participants may even compete to kill the youngest, mangiest or ugliest animal, or the animal with the bushiest tail. Contests may also be judged on a system of points attributed to each species killed, such as five points per coyote, three points per fox, etc.

Most Americans are shocked to learn that thousands of animals—including coyotes, foxes, bobcats, prairie dogs, crows, mountain lions, rabbits, squirrels and even wolves—are killed in these events every year across the United States.

Participants typically pay a fee to enter the contests, which are usually held over a weekend. They attend a check-in event to start the contest, followed by one or two days of hunting and/or trapping. The event ends with a celebration at a local hangout—often a bar or restaurant—where participants count and weigh the animals' bodies and receive prizes. Sponsors—often local gun shops or manufacturers of hunting equipment like calling devices, spotlights and night-vision scopes—frequently donate guns or hunting gear as raffle prizes.

THE FACTS

Here are the basics about the cruel and violent contests being held in most states across the U.S.:

A blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting

Unlike dogfighting and cockfighting, which have been condemned as barbaric and outlawed in every state, wildlife killing contests persist and may even be growing in popularity. These competitive killing events are simply a bloodbath for entertainment, with participants glorifying kill numbers over respect for the animals and their habitat. Participants typically dump the bodies, stacked in heaps away from the public eye, having no need for them after the prizes are awarded. Usually the meat and fur go to waste. The HSUS has conducted undercover investigations of killing contests in Maryland, New Jersey,

New York, Oregon, Indiana, Texas and other states. The investigators saw chilling scenes of participants dragging the bodies of dead animals, grinning next to the bloodied animals and sharing gruesome jokes about their kills. Children played among the dead, seemingly inured to the violence.

A widespread problem

Wildlife killing contests take place in almost all of the 43 states that still allow them. Many of the contests have high stakes, with contestants coming from all over the U.S. to compete. A single contest may draw more than 600 participants.

The following are just a few examples:

- **West Texas Big Bobcat Contest:** At its January 2020 event, 717 teams killed 34 bobcats, in addition to coyotes and gray foxes, and received \$143,400 in prize money. A single team killed 94 foxes alone.
- **13th Annual Coyote Hunt (New York State and Pennsylvania):** More than 600 participants trapped and shot 118 coyotes in competition for a \$12,750 grand prize at the 2020 event.
- **Moondog Madness Coyote Tournament (Wisconsin):** At the January 2020 leg of this tournament, 20 teams killed at least 105 coyotes.
- **4th Annual Coyote Showdown (Indiana):** Participants killed 85 coyotes and seven foxes in 2020.
- **2nd Annual Predator Calling Contest (Oklahoma):** A 4-H Club sponsored this contest, where participants competed to kill the mangiest, littlest and biggest coyote and the biggest bobcat.
- **Good ol' Boy's Fall Predator Tournament (Virginia):** 104 bobcats, coyotes, and foxes died during the 2019 event.
- **Mosquito Creek Sportsmen's Association Annual Coyote Hunt (Pennsylvania):** At the 2020 contest, nearly 5,000 participants registered to kill coyotes for \$49,140 in prize money.

A low-profile subculture

Wildlife killing contests, like dogfighting, are the province of a small subculture that is rarely glimpsed by the general public. The public's—and most hunters'—ire toward killing contests has led many organizers to keep their events low-profile to avoid negative publicity. Many of the contests are advertised by word-of-mouth within the ranks of hunters, or in private Facebook groups. Nevertheless, organizers have made efforts to expand their reach, now even encouraging young children to participate.



A scale used to weigh dead coyotes at a contest in Illinois.

Persecuted species

Misunderstood species, deemed by some to be “pests” or “varmints,” are the animals most frequently killed during these events because there are almost no laws protecting them. They often can be killed in unlimited numbers, all year long, and using almost any method. It is impossible to know how many animals are injured or die in these contests every year. Organizers generally do not need to obtain a permit from the state wildlife agency, and participants in general aren't required to report their kills. Some state agencies may have no idea these events are even happening in their state.

Cruel and unsporting

Wildlife killing contests remove any notion of fair chase, the fundamental hunting ethic that dictates that the hunter should not gain an unfair advantage over the hunted. Most contest rules do not even mention hunting ethics. Participants often use high-tech equipment and may spend months preparing. While some general hunting rules apply—for example, laws that make it unlawful to shoot from a roadway—the prospect of prize money creates a powerful incentive to ignore them. Some contests even allow the use of cruel traps, while others permit hound hunting or baiting.

One of the most chilling aspects of killing contests is the use of electronic calling devices to attract coyotes into rifle range with sounds that imitate the cry of a coyote in distress. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear this cry for help, they come to investigate. Manipulating animals' natural compassion to lure them into gun range is not hunting—it is a reprehensible practice condemned by most hunters and nonhunters alike.

Dependent young may also be orphaned during these events and left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. In fact, some contests are scheduled to occur during pup-rearing season with the stated purpose of ensuring that fewer coyote pups survive.

Baseless myths to justify the bloodshed

Wildlife killing contest participants piously claim to be helping society by ridding the environment of “varmints.” But there is a general misunderstanding and fear of some species—especially coyotes, the most common victim of killing contests.

Historically stigmatized and ceaselessly persecuted, coyotes are one of the most misunderstood creatures in North America. Claims that coyotes attack children and pets, threaten farm animals and diminish populations of game animals that “belong” to hunters are greatly exaggerated and out of step with modern scientific understanding of the importance of coyotes and other native carnivores.

Counterproductive to sound wildlife management

All species—especially native carnivores—play a vital role in healthy ecosystems. Coyotes, for example, provide a number of free, natural ecological services: helping to control disease transmission, cleaning up carrion (animal carcasses), keeping rodent populations in check, increasing biodiversity, removing sick animals from the gene pool and protecting crops.

Indiscriminate killing of coyotes may reduce their populations temporarily, but the best available science demonstrates that these species will respond with an increase in numbers. Wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. In the case of coyotes, this disruption allows more coyotes to reproduce and can increase conflicts with humans, farm animals and pets.

A public safety risk

Wildlife killing contests glorify violence and send a message to our youth that killing is fun and that life has little value. Many contest organizers, hoping to expand their base, have even created youth categories, encouraging children as young as 5 years old to participate.¹ But there is a well-documented link between animal cruelty and other



deemed to be “pests” or “varmints.” But a recent study by researchers at Ohio State University found that Americans’ attitudes toward historically stigmatized species such as coyotes is substantially more positive today than it was in 1978. Between 1978 and 2014, positive attitudes toward coyotes grew by 47%, with the majority of respondents expressing positive attitudes toward this species.² A growing number of researchers and state wildlife management professionals are also pointing out that coyotes do not have an adverse impact on the number of deer available for human hunters.³

Growing momentum to ban the events

In response to public outrage and recognizing that wildlife killing contests are ethically and ecologically indefensible, state wildlife management agencies and state lawmakers are taking action across the country. In 2014, California banned the awarding of prizes for killing furbearing and nongame mammals. Vermont and New Mexico followed with prohibitions on coyote killing contests in 2018 and 2019, respectively. In 2019, Arizona and Massachusetts outlawed killing contests for predatory and furbearing animals. In May 2020, Colorado prohibited contests for furbearers, black-tailed, white-tailed and Gunnison’s prairie dogs, and Wyoming (Richardson’s) ground squirrels. And in September 2020, Washington prohibited contests for classified and unclassified species without bag limits including bobcats, coyotes, foxes, crows and raccoons.

violent criminal behaviors. In fact, the FBI tracks crimes against animals alongside felony crimes like arson and murder because it is a strong early predictor of human violence. Protecting animals from glorified violence protects communities.

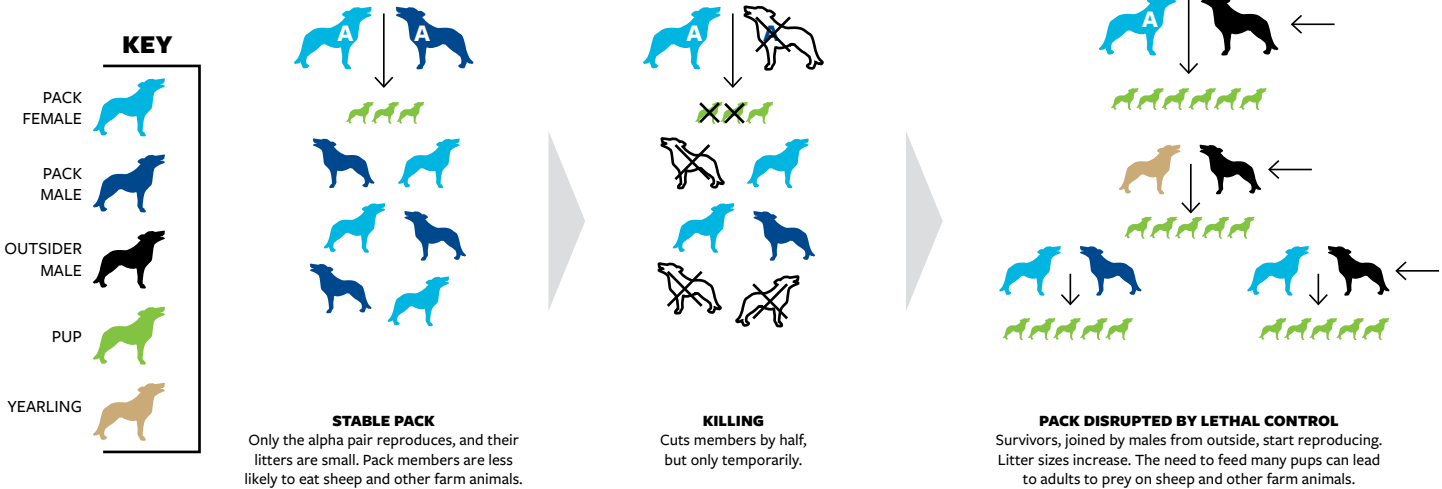
Out of step with modern society

Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is antithetical to the way most Americans believe animals should be treated. Wildlife killing contests are no different from dogfighting or cockfighting, which have been condemned as barbaric and outlawed in all 50 states. Animals killed during these contests are persecuted because they are

WHY KILLING DOESN'T WORK

Shoot or poison coyotes and you will have just as many again within a year or two. Kill one or both members of the alpha pair (A)—the only pair who normally reproduces—and 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 litter sizes will grow.

The long-term effects of coyote killing



What do leading wildlife managers say?

EXPERTS AGREE that wildlife killing contests are cruel, unsporting and counterproductive to sound wildlife management. Below are a few comments from experts about wildlife killing contests.

“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.”

—**Mike Finley, hunter and former chair, Oregon Fish and Wildlife 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.”

—**Michael Sttuon, waterfowl hunter and former president, California Fish and Game Commission**

“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.”

—**Vermont Fish and Wildlife**

“[T]he wildlife management profession does not generally recognize the use of contests as a tool with substantial wildlife management effect.”

—**The Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners**

“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.’”

—**Jim Zieler, hunter and chair, Arizona Game and Fish Commission**

“Predator-killing contests are abominations, an insult to the history of life on this planet. ... When is needless, thoughtless killing ever justified? ... Are these contests indicative of the values we want to be emulating for our kids?”

—**Mike Phillips, hunter, wolf biologist and former Montana state senator**

“Recognize that there is little evidence to support the use of killing contests for controlling predator populations... 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.”

—**The Wildlife Society**

“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.”

—**Arizona Fish and Game Commission**

“[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.”

—**Kelly Susewind, director, Washington State Department of Fish and 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.”

—**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife**

“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.”

—**Dan Gibbs, hunter and executive director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources**

“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.”

—**Idaho Fish and Game**



What do leading scientists say?

MORE THAN 70 SCIENTISTS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA have called for a prohibition on wildlife killing contests. They made the following statements in a signed letter dated January 2021.

“The most general reason to prohibit WKC [wildlife killing contests] is that hunters and wildlife managers believe, as a community, that killing animals without an adequate reason is unjustified and unsportsmanlike. Killing an animal for a prize or trophy constitutes killing without an adequate reason.”²⁴

“Some advocates of WKC argue that they are important for achieving management objectives for other species, especially game species. There is no credible evidence that indiscriminate killing of coyotes or other predators effectively serves any genuine interest in managing other species.”²⁵

On whether wildlife killing contests decrease the loss of farm animals to depredation: “[A] great deal of science has been developed on how to effectively manage depredations, including both lethal and non-lethal methods. Lessons from that science include: (i) indiscriminate

killing is ineffective and it is plausible, perhaps likely, that when associated with a WKC it would lead to increased risk of depredations. A primary reason for this concern is that only some, often only a few, individual predators participate in depredation. Indiscriminate and “pre-emptive” killing of predators associated with WKC can lead to the disruption of predators’ social structure and foraging ecology in ways that increase the likelihood of depredations. ... (ii) The indiscriminate killing associated with a WKC does not target: (a) the offending predator, (b) the site where depredation has occurred, and (c) the time when depredation has occurred. This renders WKC ineffective as a means of depredation control.”²⁶

On whether wildlife killing contests increase the abundance of ungulate species, such as deer, for hunters: “[A] large body of science indicates that killing predators, especially under circumstances associated with WKC, is not a reliable means of increasing ungulate abundance. ... Even when predators are killed to the point of impairing the ecosystem services, there is still no assurance that ungulate abundance will increase. The reason being is that ungulate abundance is frequently limited by factors other than predators—factors such as habitat and climate.”²⁷

What do hunting groups say?

LEADING HUNTING GROUPS HAVE SPOKEN OUT about the importance of carnivore species and the ineffectiveness of predator control.

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.”⁸

THE NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION

“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.”⁹

DUCKS UNLIMITED

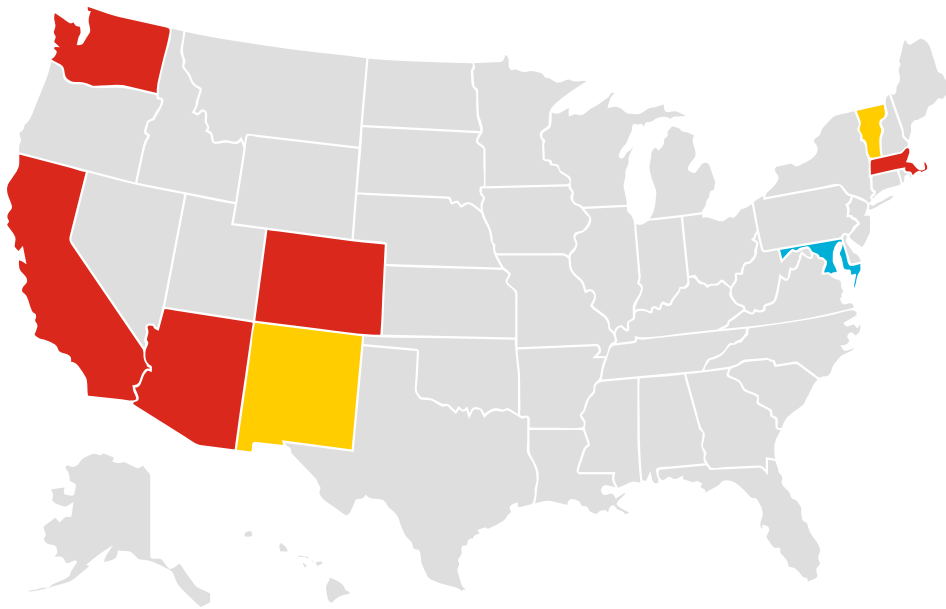
“Predator control cannot result in meaningful increases in duck numbers or birds in the bag and threatens to undermine the broad coalition of public support on which modern waterfowl conservation depends.”¹⁰

THE MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY COUNCIL

“The Mississippi Flyway Council (MFC) does not support the practice of predator removal as a viable management practice to improve waterfowl recruitment over the long term or over large geographic areas. The MFC believes that the highest conservation priorities for improving waterfowl recruitment are the landscape-level wetland and grassland habitat restoration strategies advocated by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP).”¹¹



What does the law say?



STATES THAT HAVE BANNED OR RESTRICTED WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

- Ban on predator, furbearer and/or small game killing contests
- Ban on coyote killing contests
- Indefinite moratorium on killing contests for cownose rays in the Chesapeake Bay

Arizona: 2019 (regulation)
 California: 2014 (regulation)
 Colorado: 2020 (regulation)
 Massachusetts: 2019 (regulation)
 New Mexico: 2019 (legislation)
 Vermont: 2018 (legislation)
 Washington: 2020 (regulation)

Below is a summary of existing state laws and regulations that restrict wildlife killing contests (updated September 2020). As of 2020, there is no U.S. law or code restricting killing contests on federal lands.

State	Bill, Statute, or Regulation	Summary
Arizona: Ban on killing contests for predator animals or fur-bearing animals	AAC 12-4-303(A)(4)(I)	4. A person shall not by any means: i. Participate in, organize, promote, or solicit participation in a contest where a participant uses or intends to use any device or implement to capture or kill predatory animals or fur-bearing animals as defined under A.R.S. § 17-101. For the purposes of this subsection, “contest” means a competition among participants where participants must register or record entry and pay a fee and prizes or cash are awarded to winning or successful participants.
California: Ban on killing contests for furbearers and non-game mammals	14 CCR § 465(b)	Pursuant to Fish & Game Code §2003, it is unlawful to offer any prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of furbearers in an individual contest, tournament, or derby.
	14 CCR § 472(e)	Pursuant to Fish and Game Code § 2003, it is unlawful to offer any prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of nongame mammals in an individual contest, tournament, or derby.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY

Summary of existing state laws continued.

State	Bill, Statute, or Regulation	Summary
Colorado: Ban on killing contests for big game species, furbearers, black-tailed, white-tailed and Gunnison’s prairie dogs, Wyoming (Richardson’s) ground squirrel	CO REV ST § 33-6-118	<p>It is unlawful to advertise, conduct or offer to conduct, or otherwise promote or participate in any contest or competition involving two or more persons and the monetary payment or awarding of any other prize when the object of the contest or competition involves the killing of any big game or the display for comparison of any big game or any part thereof.</p> <p>Certificates issued by organizations solely for registration and recognition of animals legally taken are not prohibited.</p>
	2 CCR 406-3-I-303	<p>#303 - Manner of Take:</p> <p>The following are legal methods of take for game species listed in this chapter. Any method of take not listed herein shall be prohibited, except as otherwise provided by Statute or Commission regulation or by 35-40-100.2-115, C.R.S.</p> <p>A. Special Conditions</p> <p>1. Contests involving black-tailed, white-tailed and Gunnison’s prairie dogs, Wyoming (Richardson’s) ground squirrel, or Furbearers are prohibited.</p> <p>a) For the purpose of these regulations, a contest is any competitive event where money or other valuable prizes are awarded for the taking of such small game and furbearers. “Valuable prizes” shall not include certificates or other similar tokens of recognition not having any significant monetary value.</p> <p>b) Commercial and noncommercial wildlife parks and field trials licensed by the Division are exempt from these provisions.</p>
Massachusetts: Ban on killing contests for predatory or furbearing animals	321 CMR 2.16	<p>It shall be unlawful for any person to organize, sponsor, promote, conduct or participate in a contest in which participants compete for prizes or other inducements that results in the capture, take or waste of those predatory or furbearing animals regulated by the Division pursuant to 321 CMR 3.02(3) or 3.02(5)(b) (2.) and (5.-11.).</p>
New Mexico: Ban on coyote killing contests	Chapter 30-18-16	<p>A. It is unlawful for a person to organize, cause, sponsor, arrange, hold or participate in a coyote-killing contest.</p> <p>B. As used in this section, “coyote-killing contest” means an organized or sponsored competition with the objective of killing coyotes for prizes or entertainment.</p>
Vermont: Ban on coyote killing contests	Act 170 of 2018	<p>Prohibits the holding or conducting of, or participation in, a coyote-hunting competition in the state.</p>
Washington: Ban on killing contests for classified and unclassified species without bag limits	WAC 220-412-110	<p>Contests involving unclassified and classified wildlife species without a bag limit are prohibited.</p>
	WAC 220-413-060	<p>It is unlawful to participate in a hunting contest for which no permit has been issued by the department.</p>



Frequently asked questions

Q: IS A BAN ON KILLING CONTESTS AN ANTI-HUNTING MEASURE?

A: No, the sole objective of the proposed policy is to prohibit inhumane, unsporting and wasteful wildlife killing contests, which do not reflect well on ethical hunters and are opposed by a growing number of wildlife management professionals and state wildlife commissions and agencies.¹² This policy would not otherwise affect the lawful, regulated hunting of wildlife species.

Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS AND BIG BUCK HUNTS?

A: The Wildlife Society, whose mission is “to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation,” recently issued a statement on wildlife killing contests that reads in part: “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 into the competition.”¹³

Q: ISN'T THIS A CASE OF URBAN VS. RURAL VALUES AND TRADITIONS?

A: No. When it comes to wildlife, people—whether they live in urban, suburban or rural areas of the state—do not support practices that they view as pointless, sadistic, unsporting or wasteful. This is simply

a matter of ethics, and it addresses an irresponsible practice that recklessly wastes our wildlife. This issue isn't about the differences in values between rural and urban residents. It's about how we value and treat the public's wildlife. We can value hunting as a tradition and establish restrictions on practices that are irresponsible and unsporting, because our wildlife isn't owned by the minority who hunt and trap today, or the small percentage who participate in this blood sport. Our wildlife belong to all the people of the state.

Respected outdoor writers and ethical hunters have spoken out against wildlife killing contests. For example, Jim Posewitz, retired biologist with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and author of the books *Beyond Fair Chase* and *Inherit the Hunt: A Journey into American 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.”¹⁴ Mike Finley, former chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, also recently said to a state legislative committee, “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.”¹⁵

Additionally, wildlife killing contests do not resolve wildlife conflicts occurring in rural communities. Scientific studies show that randomly killing large numbers of coyotes will not mitigate conflicts with farm animals, pets or people, and may even increase their numbers by disrupting their stable breeding structure. Other studies have found, and wildlife management professionals are increasingly pointing out, that killing coyotes will not increase numbers of white-tailed deer or turkeys for hunters to pursue.¹⁶

And finally, wild carnivore species like coyotes and foxes provide vital—and free—ecosystem services. They help to control disease transmission, remove sick animals from the gene pool, increase biodiversity and protect crops by keeping rodent populations in check. And by preying on mice and other rodents that harbor disease-carrying ticks, coyotes and foxes are important for controlling tick-borne diseases such as Lyme.

Q: DON'T WE NEED TO CONTROL COYOTE NUMBERS TO SAVE DEER AND TURKEYS FOR HUNTERS?

A: No. The best available science indicates that indiscriminately killing native carnivores is not an effective method for increasing game species abundance, including populations of ungulates, small game animals and game birds. In response to hunters' concerns that wild carnivores are diminishing populations of small game animals, the Pennsylvania Game Commission issued a statement refuting this argument in 2016: "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 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."¹⁷



On its website, the National Wild Turkey Federation says, "Removing a random predator from the landscape has no impact whatsoever on widespread turkey populations," and the organization goes on to say that instead of worrying about predation, the focus should instead be on improving habitat.¹⁸ An article in *Ducks Unlimited* magazine adds, "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."¹⁹ Finally, "the Mississippi Flyway Council (MFC)

says it does not support the practice of predator removal as a viable management practice to improve waterfowl recruitment over the long term or over large geographic areas. The MFC believes that the highest conservation priorities for improving waterfowl recruitment are the landscape-level wetland and grassland habitat restoration strategies advocated by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)."²⁰

Regarding the impact of coyotes specifically on small game populations, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, citing a long list of studies, found that coyotes are beneficial to a wide array of game bird species, including ducks and quail, because they suppress populations of smaller mammals, including feral cats, opossums, raccoons, red foxes and skunks, and lessen their effects on other species, including birds. The commission also found that "most coyote diet studies document low to no prevalence of wild turkey or other gamebirds in diets."²¹

Killing predators also is ineffective at protecting larger game animals such as deer. The best available science demonstrates that killing native carnivores to increase ungulate populations is unlikely to produce positive results because the key to ungulate survival is access to adequate nutrition through habitat protection, not reducing predation.²² Comprehensive studies, including those conducted in Colorado²³ and Idaho,²⁴ show that killing native carnivores fails to increase deer herds. In recent studies that involved predator removal, those removals had no beneficial impact on mule deer populations.²⁵ Furthermore, a recent study of several Eastern states found that coyotes are not adversely impacting deer populations in that region.²⁶

Q: DON'T KILLING CONTESTS HELP CONTROL WILDLIFE POPULATIONS?

A: No. The indiscriminate killing that these contests promote is counterproductive to effective wildlife population management. Scientific studies have shown that wildlife populations that are depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly due to the sudden drop in competition for resources.²⁷ This effect is well documented in the case of coyote populations in particular. Lethal control of coyotes is a temporary fix that ultimately leads to an increase in the 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.²⁸

Indiscriminate killing of coyotes stimulates increases in their populations because it disrupts their social structure, thereby encouraging more breeding and migration, which ultimately results in more coyotes.²⁹ Unexploited coyote populations are self-regulating based on the availability of food and habitat and territorial defense by resident family groups. Typically, only the dominant pair in a pack of coyotes reproduces, which behaviorally suppresses reproduction among



subordinate members of the group. But when one or both members of the alpha pair are killed, other pairs will form and reproduce, lone coyotes will move in to find mates, coyotes will breed at younger ages, litters are larger and pup survival has been documented to be higher. These factors work synergistically to increase coyote populations following exploitation events.³⁰

In 2018, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (North Carolina Commission) published its Coyote Management Plan. The plan, which was developed using a large body of scientific and peer-reviewed literature, concluded that indiscriminate, lethal methods of controlling coyotes—including bounty programs, which are similar to wildlife killing contests—are ineffective and counterproductive, that coyotes provide benefits to humans and ecosystems (even outside of their historic range) and that nonlethal measures are the best way to address conflicts with coyotes.³¹ The North Carolina Commission stated that “numerous bounty program case studies have led to conclusions that bounties are ineffective in achieving real declines of predators (including coyotes), at addressing farm animals depredation, or at positively affecting populations of species targeted for protection.”³² It further noted that killing predators in bounty programs may have undesirable effects, such as increasing prey species viewed as pests and killing nonoffending coyotes, which creates a niche vacancy for coyotes who have learned to prey on farm animals.³³ The North Carolina Commission reached the following conclusions:

- Intensive removal of coyotes is time-consuming and expensive, and research has yet to show it to be effective.³⁴
- Coyotes rapidly increase their populations when large numbers of coyotes are removed from an area.³⁵
- A review of 34 studies that undertook intensive coyote removal found no reduction of coyote numbers over the long term.³⁶
- Intensive hunting and trapping efforts aimed at reducing coyote numbers either maintained or increased coyote populations.³⁷
- A coyote population can rebound in fewer than five years even when 90 percent of the population is eliminated from an area.³⁸

It’s impossible to completely eradicate coyotes from an area.³⁹ New coyotes will quickly replace vacant territorial niches where coyotes have been removed. Coyote pairs hold territories, which leaves single coyotes (“floaters”) continually looking for new places to call home.⁴⁰

Q: DON’T KILLING CONTESTS HELP PREVENT CONFLICTS WITH PETS OR FARM ANIMALS?

A: No. These events do not prevent conflicts with wildlife and may even increase them. Disrupting the family structure of predators may increase attacks. For example, exploited coyote populations tend to have younger, less-experienced coyotes who have not been taught appropriate hunting behaviors. These coyotes are more likely to prey on easy targets like farm animals or pets. Additionally, exploited coyote packs are more likely to have increased numbers of yearlings reproducing and higher pup survival. Feeding pups is a significant motivation for coyotes to switch from killing small and medium-sized prey to killing sheep.⁴¹ Killing contests do not target specific, problem-causing coyotes. Most killing contests target coyotes in woodlands and grasslands where conflicts with humans, farm animals, and pets are minimal—not coyotes who have become habituated by human-provided attractants such as unsecured garbage, pet food or farm animal carcasses.

Furthermore, common arguments regarding the conflicts with farm animals are exaggerated. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture data, losses to wild carnivores are minuscule. In 2015, U.S. cows and sheep inventories (including calves and lambs) numbered approximately 118.8 million animals.⁴² Of that total, 474,965



cows and sheep (including lambs and calves) were lost to all carnivores combined (including coyotes, unknown predators and dogs), or 0.39 percent.⁴³ The predominant sources of mortality to farm animals, by far, are nonpredator causes including disease, illness, birthing problems and weather.⁴⁴ The North Carolina Commission has noted that, based on USDA data, dogs are an equal or greater risk to sheep, goats and cows as compared to coyotes.⁴⁵



Prevention—not lethal control—is the best method for minimizing conflicts with coyotes.⁴⁶ 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 farm animals (such as electric fences, guard animals and removing dead animals) are more effective than lethal control in addressing coyote-human conflicts.⁴⁷

Q: AREN'T THE ANIMALS TARGETED IN THESE CONTESTS JUST PESTS ANYWAY?

A: No. All wildlife species play integral roles in healthy ecosystems, and indiscriminately killing them harms our environment and our communities. Coyotes, for example, provide a number of free, natural ecological services.⁴⁸ They help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, which curtails hantavirus, a rodent-borne

illness that can kill humans. In addition, coyotes consume carrion, increase biodiversity, remove sick animals from the gene pool and disperse seeds. Coyotes have trophic cascade effects such as indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores and increasing the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.⁴⁹

Q: AREN'T COYOTES NON-NATIVE IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES?

A: Until a few hundred years ago, coyotes primarily occupied the western two-thirds of the United States. In response to human development, the removal of large carnivores like mountain lions and wolves from the landscape, and new food sources like crops, coyotes have dramatically increased their range and can now be found in all 49 continental states.⁵⁰ Despite extensive lethal control efforts, coyotes have tripled their range in the U.S. since 1850.⁵¹ This expansion should not be viewed negatively. As the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission explains it:

“In their historic range, coyotes play an important ecological role in nature as an apex predator. In their new range, coyotes are filling the niche left vacant by large mammalian predators (i.e., wolves, cougars) that have been extirpated. It is important to remember that predation is a natural, normally occurring process in nature and that prey species develop physiological and morphological adaptations to offset predation risk and impact. While the arrival of coyotes in the eastern landscape is generally viewed negatively, there are some ecological and human benefits resulting from their presence. For example, coyotes can have positive impacts on ground nesting birds (e.g., waterfowl, quail) by preying on nest predators (e.g., foxes, raccoons and opossums; Sovada et al. 1995). Additionally, coyotes can benefit landowners by reducing numbers of groundhogs and rodents.”⁵²

Q: HAVE OTHER STATES BANNED WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS?

A: Yes. As of September 2020, seven states have outlawed killing contests. In 2014, the California Fish and Game Commission banned the events, making it illegal to offer a prize, inducement or reward for killing furbearing and nongame mammals, including bobcats, coyotes and foxes. Vermont followed with a ban on coyote killing contests in 2018. New Mexico prohibited coyote killing contests in early 2019, and the Arizona Game and Fish Commission’s statewide ban on killing contests for predator and furbearer species went into effect in November 2019. In December 2019, the Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Board approved a statewide ban on killing contests for predator and furbearer species. In 2020, Colorado Parks and Wildlife prohibited contests for furbearers, prairie dogs and other species, and Washington banned them for classified and unclassified species without bag limits, including bobcats, coyotes, crows, foxes and raccoons.

Going undercover at wildlife killing contests

HSUS INVESTIGATORS HAVE GONE UNDERCOVER

to expose wildlife killing contests across the country.

NEW YORK UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION (2020)

In 2020, the Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs of Sullivan County Inc. sponsored a coyote killing contest in which participants from New York and six Pennsylvania counties killed as many coyotes as they could lure to their deaths. The winner for the heaviest coyote received \$2,000 for killing a female whom he shot over bait. Participants killed at least 118 coyotes for \$10,000 in prize money. Killing included shooting over bait, leghold traps and luring coyotes using digital calling devices.

The HSUS investigator found dead coyotes thrown in the fire-house’s trash bin. One participant stated, “If it’s not useful, we throw them in the [trash]. Some of them are pretty messed up.”

Female coyotes are often pregnant when killed. A participant told our investigator, “She might be right full of babies too, you know?” He went on to tell the investigator that an obviously pregnant female



Both photos: A wildlife killing contest in Sullivan County, New York.

coyote had been cut open at the event, and “the babies already had hair on them – they were ready.”

Organizers stated that participants often try to cheat by bringing the same coyote in twice, so two toes are cut off from each dead coyote to discourage this practice. “When it comes to this ... people will do anything. Yeah, because the winner gets \$2,000.” Read the full investigative report [here](#).

MARYLAND UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION (2020)

In 2020, HSUS investigators went undercover at two wildlife killing contest events in Maryland. At the Predator Hunters of Maryland Contest in Unionville, our investigators saw the bloodied bodies—some with gruesome injuries—of around 200 animals piled up for counting. Children played among the dead animals, and participants celebrated. The contest winner killed 38 foxes for a prize of about \$400. Prizes were also awarded for killing coyotes and raccoons. The investigators overheard participants discussing plans to dump the animals at a landfill following the contest.



Maryland wildlife killing contest investigation shows red foxes killed by contestants.



Children are often encouraged to participate, as in this New York contest.

At the Southern Maryland Predator Hunt in Waldorf, HSUS investigators witnessed pickup trucks loaded with dead red and gray foxes. The winning team brought in 27 foxes during the approximately 16-hour allowable “hunting” window. Participants used digital calling devices to lure foxes to their deaths.

A participant justified the killing by saying that foxes kill turkeys—a claim that science debunks. Read the full investigative report [here](#) and watch footage [here](#).

OREGON UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION (2018)

In 2018, HSUS investigators went undercover at the weigh-in for the Young Farmers and Ranchers First Annual Coyote Hunt in Hines. The investigators saw trucks pulling into the parking lot one after another to unload the bodies of animals. The contestants laughed and joked about their kills as they tossed dozens of bloody carcasses from the trucks and dragged them across the parking lot so they could be weighed. One participant remarked that the snow covering the ground made it easier to track and kill the coyotes, and another pointed out, to laughter, “This one here got gut shot.” Go [here](#) to read more and watch the footage.

NEW JERSEY AND NEW YORK UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION (2018)

In early 2018, HSUS undercover investigators filmed the aftermath of two killing contests in the Eastern United States. At the Parlin Buck Club’s 4th Annual 24-Hour Predator Killing Contest in Barnegat, New Jersey, a group of men laughed and posed in front of about 15 dead foxes hanging by their feet from a rack. A few weeks earlier, participants in the Bark at the Moon Coyote Club’s New York State Predator Hunt in Macedon placed the animals they killed in rows outside a restaurant. Approximately 200 animals were piled up to be counted, weighed and displayed at that event. Read more and watch the undercover video [here](#).



Red foxes killed by contestants, shown by a Maryland wildlife killing contest investigation.



Maryland native wildlife killed for cash prizes.

Gather information

TO BE AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE, it is important that you are able to speak with authority about wildlife killing contests and how they impact members of the community.

RESEARCH YOUR AREA

Contact the HSUS to receive information about particular wildlife killing contests that we are aware of in your state and information about any efforts to restrict them. We will also give you guidance on addressing this issue in your community. Email us at wildlife@humansociety.org. You can also search Google and Facebook to find advertisements and event pages for upcoming wildlife killing contests. Compile the following information:

Numbers

- How many wildlife killing contests occur in my state every year?
- How many animals are killed in these events every year?
- How many participants enter these contests?
- Which contests are the largest, in terms of the number of participants or the number of animals killed?

Species

- Which species of animals are targeted at the contests?
- What is the rationale for targeting these species?



Objectives

- What must the winner do in order to win a prize—kill the heaviest animal? Kill the most animals? Some other objective?

Prizes

- What is the grand prize?
- Are there door or raffle prizes?

Logistics

- What are the dates of the events?
- Where are the events located?

Rules

- Has the organizer posted rules regarding allowable methods that can be used, such as shooting, trapping, baiting, hounding, spotlights, night vision devices or calling devices?
- If so, is it legal to use those methods while hunting in your state? Your state wildlife management agency should have current hunting rules and regulations posted on its website.
- Are there any reporting requirements for the contest?

Contest participants

- Event organizers are typically individuals or organizations that provide details about the event and accept registration forms—often local hunting groups.
- Event hosts may provide the land or the venue for the contest or the prehunt check-in and posthunt celebration—this could include landowners, the Bureau of Land Management (for federal lands), the state wildlife agency (for state lands), restaurants or bars.
- Event sponsors are usually gun shops or hunting outfitter companies that provide financial support for the events, including the donation of guns or other hunting gear for prizes.
- Event beneficiaries are individuals or groups—such as a local fire department, church or nonprofit organization—that receive proceeds from the event as a donation. Most events do not donate to beneficiaries.



IDENTIFY COALITION PARTNERS

Developing a broad base of support will greatly increase the chances of ending wildlife killing contests in your community. Potential allies may be all around you. Look first in the most likely places: your family, friends and neighbors, as well as animal and environmental advocates that you know.

Research others in your city, county and state that might support efforts to end contests. Look for local humane societies, animal shelters, animal protection and conservation organizations, law enforcement, veterinarians, zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, wildlife rehabilitation organizations, wildlife sanctuaries accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries, civic groups, wildlife scientists and experts, outdoor recreation representatives, chambers of commerce, predator-friendly ranchers, ethical hunters, faith leaders and well-known and/or influential individuals.

KNOW YOUR OPPOSITION

It's essential that you become knowledgeable about the various people and entities that will oppose your efforts. This information

will help when you go before government leaders, the media and others to talk about the importance of the legislation or action you are proposing, and why your viewpoint should be adopted over the opposition's.

Find out who is organizing, hosting, sponsoring and participating in the contests. You can typically find this information in the event advertisements. The National Coalition to End Wildlife Killing Contests, of which the HSUS is a founding member, maintains a database of killing contests; contact us at wildlife@humaneociety.org for a listing of those in your state.

You should also identify potential objections to the proposal and be able to present comprehensive counterarguments as to why wildlife killing contests are harmful to animals, the environment and the public, and do not protect farm animals or increase numbers of game species. For example, by compiling records on actual, verified conflicts in the area and showing that hunting reports for deer, turkey and other game species are satisfactory, you can help counter the common rationale that killing contests “protect” farm animals or help to increase deer or turkey numbers for hunters.

Take action

ONCE YOU'VE ARMED YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE about wildlife killing contests in your state, you're ready to take action. There are three main methods for combating wildlife killing contests in your community:

- 1. Raising public awareness:** Most people are shocked to learn that wildlife killing contests are a common occurrence in their state or even their own community. Public outrage drives change for animals, and you can help spread the word using conventional media and social media.
- 2. Shutting down individual contests:** Every wildlife killing contest is typically hosted or sponsored by local businesses. Respectfully placing pressure on these businesses to stop supporting or promoting wildlife killing contests may encourage contest organizers to cancel their events—a lifesaving measure that will also help build momentum for the passage of a state law or regulation banning wildlife killing contests.
- 3. Passing laws that ban wildlife killing contests:** The ultimate goal is to prohibit wildlife killing contests in your state. You can achieve that through state legislation (passed by the state legislature) or with state regulations (generally passed by state wildlife agencies or commissions). If the political landscape is not ripe for a new law, a nonbinding resolution from your local government can help lay the groundwork for a statewide ban.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Most citizens are unaware that thousands of wild animals fall victim to wildlife killing contests every year and are appalled to learn that these events may be taking place in their community. Educating the public is key to ending these cruel practices. Use the media, social media and public events to spread the message.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN “ASK”: Whenever you reach out to the public, you should always include an “ask”—tie your message to a specific action that the public can take. Examples include asking people to:

- Contact their state lawmaker to ask them to introduce or support legislation that bans wildlife killing contests.
- Contact their state wildlife agency to ask them to pass a regulation that bans wildlife killing contests.

- Contact their city or county council member to ask them to introduce or support a resolution (nonbinding opinion) condemning wildlife killing contests.
- Contact the organizer or host of a scheduled wildlife killing contest to encourage them to cancel the event.
- Contact the sponsor of a scheduled killing contest to encourage them not to sponsor future events.

Now that you have your “ask,” you're ready to take action.

SUBMIT LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OF YOUR LOCAL PAPER

Letters to the editor are an important tool for influencing public opinion; the letters section is typically the most widely read section of the newspaper. Lawmakers frequently read the opinion section to gauge the interest of their constituents on a variety of matters. The more letters submitted to the same publication that express similar viewpoints, the greater the likelihood that one or more letters will be published, so encourage others to write as well. It can also help shape news coverage if editors recognize this as an issue that's important to readers.

The average letter to the editor is only about five or six sentences (250 words or less)—keep it short and direct. Some papers list their word count limit in the letters section. Your main point (i.e., wildlife killing contests are cruel, dangerous, unsporting or wasteful) should be clearly stated in the beginning of the letter to grab the reader's attention. Don't forget to include an “ask” (i.e., the action you want readers to take after reading your letter). Timing is also important, so submit your letter before a wildlife killing contest is scheduled to occur or prior to key legislative actions. This guide contains a few examples of letters to the editor that you can adapt for your needs, and [here](#) are some tips on writing and submitting letters.

SUBMIT AN OPINION PIECE (“OP-ED”) TO YOUR LOCAL PAPER

Opinion editorial pieces (commonly known as “op-eds”) are similar to letters, but they are longer and provide more context regarding a particular issue. While letters to the editor may be around 250 words or fewer, op-eds may be 500 to 800 words. Media outlets are more likely to publish op-eds written by individuals who have authority on a particular issue or are seen as a leader in their community. Outline

your stake in the issue—are you a business owner, veterinarian, wildlife rehabilitator, animal shelter or rescue worker or volunteer, scientist, member of academia, hunter, hiker, wildlife watcher, parent or school or community association leader concerned with animal welfare, the environment or public safety? Say so! Your main point (i.e., wildlife killing contests are cruel, dangerous, unsporting or wasteful) should be clearly stated in the beginning of the op-ed to grab the reader’s attention. Don’t forget to include an “ask” (i.e., the action you want readers to take after reading your op-ed). Timing is also important, so submit your op-ed before a wildlife killing contest is scheduled to occur or prior to key legislative actions.

SPREAD THE WORD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Engage your network on social media to help combat wildlife killing contests. Inform them of scheduled wildlife killing contests and important legislative actions and ask them to get involved by submitting letters to the editor, contacting the event sponsor or host and joining your coalition. Social media is a great way to find like-minded individuals who will help you in your mission! Our guide includes sample sharegraphics, tweets and Facebook posts.

ATTEND A TOWN HALL MEETING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

A good way to raise awareness is to attend a town hall meeting where your local elected official(s) or other lawmaker(s) will be present. Typically there is an opportunity to present public comment or ask a question. This is an ideal opportunity to discuss why wildlife killing contests should be prohibited and put the issue right before the decision makers for a comment.

ORGANIZE A PUBLIC EDUCATION EVENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

If you have a strong grasp on the issue and how it impacts your community, consider hosting a public event to educate fellow citizens and encourage them to take action. You’ll want to invite key stakeholders to co-host, speak at or attend the event—including local elected officials or state lawmakers. Reach out to the HSUS for guidance at wildlife@humansociety.org.

SHUTTING DOWN INDIVIDUAL CONTESTS

Targeting specific, scheduled wildlife killing contests in your state is an effective method for combating the blood sport. When public outrage forces contest organizers to cancel their events, it sends a message to the community that wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated and helps build momentum for policy changes.

CONTACT EVENT HOSTS AND SPONSORS

Restaurants or bars often host wildlife killing contest-related activities, including kickoff events and post-contest celebrations, while gun shops or hunting outfitter businesses frequently sponsor and donate prizes to the event. Local businesses are sensitive to public scrutiny, and simply reaching out to them to express your disapproval of their involvement and to educate them about wildlife killing contests may be enough to persuade them to withdraw their support. Without an event location and financial support, contest organizers may be forced to cancel their events. You can find out who’s hosting and/or sponsoring a wildlife killing contest event by looking at the event’s advertisement, website or Facebook page.

Killing contest hosts typically provide the land to be used for killing, or the venue for the pre-contest check-in and post-contest celebration. Hosts could include landowners (including public landowners such as the Bureau of Land Management), restaurants, bars, fire stations or others.

Killing contest sponsors often provide financial support, including raffle and door prizes, and are often listed on the event’s website or Facebook page. Call, email, send a letter or contact hosts and sponsors on social media and politely ask them not to support this event in the future. Online petitions can be used to both educate people and urge the event host and/or sponsor to stop supporting events like this in the future. We have included sample host/sponsor letters in this guide.

PASSING LAWS OR RESOLUTIONS ON WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

You can make long-lasting change in your state by helping to enact prohibitions or restrictions on wildlife killing contests. These measures might address killing contests for many species or for only certain ones, depending on which species are commonly targeted and the existing legal framework in your state. For example, the HSUS and other groups have worked with Maryland state legislators to enact a moratorium on killing contests for cownose rays in the Chesapeake Bay.

An animal’s strongest ally for change is you. As a constituent, you have the most influence on your local and state officials. All you need is patience, commitment and the determination to communicate with those who represent you on the local and/or state level.

There are three main processes for securing bans or restrictions on wildlife killing contests:

- 1. Local governing body:** You can ask your city or county elected officials to pass a nonbinding resolution or proclamation (i.e. a position statement or opinion) opposing wildlife killing contests. A resolution is not a law and thus cannot ban killing contests, but resolutions are a great way to show public support for an

issue and can serve as building blocks for a statewide ban—as they did in Arizona and New Mexico.

- 2. State wildlife management agency:** A state's wildlife management agency typically has the power, granted to it by the state's legislature or the state's constitution, to promulgate regulations on the taking of wildlife. Though it varies by state, most wildlife management agencies and commissions will have the power to pass regulations banning wildlife killing contests—as they did in Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts and Washington.
- 3. State legislature:** State legislatures generally have broad authority to pass laws regulating the taking of fish and wildlife within the state. In 2018, the Vermont legislature outlawed coyote killing contests, as did the New Mexico legislature in 2019.

The following information will help get you started on creating policy changes on the state and local levels.



WORK WITH YOUR CITY OR COUNTY OFFICIALS TO PASS A RESOLUTION

You've done all your research on wildlife killing contests in your state—now put that knowledge into action! You can make a significant difference by asking your city or county to pass a resolution or proclamation expressing its opposition to wildlife killing contests and calling for a statewide ban. Here are suggested action steps.

Prepare your materials

Convert your research into concise fact sheets to use in your efforts to pass a resolution. You will need a short (no more than one or two pages) fact sheet explaining the problem and why a resolution is needed. Include general information as well as a listing of wildlife killing contests in your state. This guide contains sample fact sheets that you can adapt for your needs.

Learn the process

The resolution process varies around the country, so take the time to become familiar with how things work in your city or county. An official or employee in your local government may be able to help you. Attend a few meetings of the governing body you hope to influence. Listen to the kinds of questions the members ask and the issues they take most seriously. By understanding their general concerns, you will be able to craft your arguments accordingly.

Find a friend in office

Public officials take constituents' interests seriously, so try talking to your own council member, county commissioner or alderman first. However, as much as we would like the people we vote for to agree with us, this may not always be the case. If your own council member is not interested, do not despair. Try to find another official with an interest in animal issues and pitch your idea to her or him. Local or state animal advocacy organizations or nonprofit animal shelters may also be able to point you toward a sympathetic decision maker.

Helpful tips for your meeting

Before any meeting with an official, research the person you'll be talking with as much as you can, develop an agenda and prepare a packet of the materials you developed to leave with him or her. For helpful tips on meeting with elected officials, please go [here](#).

Dress professionally and be cordial. Practice your presentation ahead of time. If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the official you will find out and get back in touch. Do not be discouraged if the official agrees with only a portion of your proposal. Compromise is often necessary in legislative advocacy. Be candid about which entities will likely oppose the resolution.

Promptly follow up on your meeting by sending a letter or email thanking your elected official for her or his time, briefly restating your position and responding to any unanswered questions that came up during the meeting.

Develop a proposed resolution

Next, you will need a proposed resolution to present to the city or county officials. Resolutions differ from ordinances or laws in that they are nonbinding—they don't have any authority of law and are more of an expression of the opinion or a declaration of a governing body. Because of this, you may find some local policymakers more willing to pass a resolution, which allows them to express their position on an issue without expending a lot of political capital with opposition groups.

When drafting your resolution, keep in mind the number and types of wildlife killing contests that happen in your state (and especially in your city or county), what species of animals are commonly targeted by the contests and what other outdoor activities your state residents

normally enjoy. You may also wish to highlight the importance of native carnivore species like coyotes and foxes to your state's ecosystem, and the growing popularity of wildlife watching among your state's residents. You can find the latest wildlife watching numbers in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* [here](#). As an example, at the end of this section we've included the text of a resolution that passed in Arizona in 2019. The HSUS is glad to help you draft a resolution and craft language that is specific to your city, county or state. We can also provide you with a list of city and county resolutions on wildlife killing contests that have been passed across the U.S.—just email us at wildlife@humansociety.org.

CONSULT WITH YOUR STATE WILDLIFE AGENCY OR COMMISSION ON A REGULATORY BAN

A state's wildlife management agency typically has the power, granted to it by the state's legislature or the state's constitution, to promulgate regulations on the taking of wildlife. Though it varies by state, most wildlife management agencies and commissions will have the power to pass regulations banning wildlife killing contests. Before approaching the legislature, contact your wildlife agency to see if a regulation is feasible. Even if it is not feasible, you've done your due diligence—state lawmakers often want to know if you've tried the regulatory route before they will consider spearheading wildlife protection legislation.

Call, email and write to your agency or commission and politely ask it to pass regulations banning wildlife killing contests. You might also consider attending a public agency or commission meeting and, during the public comment portion of the meeting, express your concern about wildlife killing contests and urge the panel to pass a ban. For your campaign to pass a regulatory ban, you can use many of the tips covered under the following section regarding passing a legislative ban.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies maintains a list of state wildlife agencies [here](#). Also email us at wildlife@humansociety.org to see if the HSUS is already working with your state wildlife agency or commission on a wildlife killing contest regulation.

WORK WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO ENACT A STATEWIDE LEGISLATIVE BAN ON WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

Once you have harnessed the growing public opposition to wildlife killing contests, you can approach your state legislature to propose a law prohibiting this activity. If you decide to pursue this, though, please first check with us at wildlife@humansociety.org to see if the HSUS is already working on a measure in your state legislature.

If such a proposal is not already in motion in your state, contact your

state lawmakers to discuss introducing a ban on wildlife killing contests. You can find your state legislators and their contact information [here](#). For helpful tips on lobbying, go [here](#). Many state legislature websites will provide an overview of the legislative process in that state.

Here are key aspects to consider for legislation to ban wildlife killing contests:

Species covered: Is the goal to include all wildlife species or only certain species that are primarily targeted in killing contests in your state? Proposals that include more species may draw more opposition. Please also see our sidebar about deer hunting and “big buck” contests.

Activities prohibited: Which contest-related activities need to be banned? California's ban is narrow in scope in that it prohibits only the offering of a prize or other inducement for the taking of wildlife. In contrast, the Massachusetts ban makes it unlawful for any person to organize, sponsor, promote, conduct or participate in a contest for the taking of coyote, bobcat, red fox, gray fox, weasel, mink, skunk, river otter, muskrat, beaver, fisher, raccoon and opossum.

What about “big buck” contests?

Some legislators and hunting groups may ask whether your bill affects deer hunting, or more specifically “big buck” contests or other trophy deer competitions. Of course the answer depends on your bill language, but we strongly recommend that you draft it so it does not affect regulated deer hunting. Instead, focus your efforts on the species most commonly targeted in contests in your state, who are rarely protected by closed seasons (periods when hunting is not allowed) or bag limits (on the number of animals that can be killed per day or hunting season). The Wildlife Society, an organization that promotes science-based wildlife management, said on this topic:

*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.**

**Issue Statement: Wildlife Killing Contests by The Wildlife Society, March 7, 2019, found [here](#).*

A narrower bill will be easier to pass but may have loopholes that allow some bad actors off the hook. Consider the state's political climate, which species are most often targeted in contests in your state and the public's appetite for a killing contest ban. You may have better success if you limit the scope of the proposal.

Contest objectives: What types of contests need to be banned? In some contests, the objective is to kill the greatest number of wildlife. In other contests, the goal is to kill the heaviest animal or to win the most points (e.g., three points per bobcat, two points per coyote, one point per fox). To avoid significant loopholes, a broad prohibition may be necessary—after all, if you ban only contests in which the goal is to kill the most animals, organizers can easily switch their contests to the point system or to the heaviest animal or even create a new category, such as “fluffiest tail” or “mangiest mutt.” Thus, some jurisdictions have avoided this by simply banning contests that have the objective of killing wildlife for cash, prizes or other inducements.

Build a supporting coalition: Getting a state law or regulation enacted takes real effort and requires meeting with lawmakers, testifying at legislative hearings and garnering support from others for the proposal. Even in states with a large population, it can be common for very few people to get involved in policy issues—which means a small group of people are often changing laws and policies. Getting active support from diverse groups in your state can make or break the legislation you are trying to pass. Lawmakers like to hear from a broad range of their constituents.

You might want to include the following people and organizations in your efforts. You can even ask them to reach out to their own group's members and to engage their own media contacts.

- Wildlife rehabilitators
- Veterinarians and other veterinary professionals (please contact us at wildlife@humansociety.org for help with locating wildlife-friendly veterinary professionals in your state)
- Conservation or environmental organizations
- Animal advocates
- Like-minded sportsmen and sportswomen
- Biologists, ecologists and other wildlife scientists
- Local chambers of commerce or visitor or tourism bureaus
- Animal shelters, rescue groups or other animal welfare organizations
- Local tourism and recreation guides and businesses
- Outdoor clubs for hiking, birdwatching, canoeing and kayaking
- Parent, school or community associations concerned with child safety and development
- Ranchers and farmers who have adopted predator-friendly methods of protecting their animals



Start reaching out to your list of individuals and groups to garner support for your bill. Let them know of your efforts and secure letters of support and commitments to meet with their elected officials, attend and/or testify at hearings and conduct outreach to other state residents.

Prepare for opposition: While every state is different, the odds are that there will be opposition to your proposed ban on killing contests. Be sure to prepare the sponsor of the bill with information about the opponents' concerns (and the data, facts and talking points to address them) well in advance of a public hearing. Creating a short fact sheet with common arguments and answers can be very helpful to your sponsor, as well as current data on the state's deer and turkey hunting numbers (to show that the presence of a robust native carnivore population also means a healthy prey species population).

Generate support using social media: You can use tools like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to spread the word, garner support, post alerts and keep followers updated on developments such as upcoming hearings and votes. You can also use them to reach out to legislators and urge their support for pending legislation. Consider creating a Facebook page dedicated to your effort.

Incorporate the use of a hashtag (#) in your postings. Be mindful that using too many hashtags can clutter a post and make it more difficult to read. Keep it short, for example #YesOn317 or #EndWildlifeKillingContests or #No2WildlifeKillingContests.

Use the media to influence public opinion: Submit letters to the editor and opinion pieces (also called op-eds), and request to meet

with the newspaper's editorial board to encourage them to support your position by publishing an editorial. Cultivate a relationship with local reporters, and keep them updated on developments.

Lobby elected officials: First, you'll need to find a lawmaker to sponsor your bill—often you'll need a sponsor in both chambers of the legislature (the Senate and the House/Assembly). Your sponsor(s) will champion your bill and advise you on how to advance it through the legislature. Once a public hearing has been scheduled, make every effort to ensure that you have the votes you need for the legislation to pass. Ensure that you have met with every committee member, provided them with your information packets and responded to their concerns. Don't be afraid to ask whether you have their vote. Encourage as many residents as possible to write to and call their legislators. Reach out to your coalition partners to help publicize the issue and issue a call to action through alerts and letters. The key is to persuade a majority of the committee members to vote in your favor.

Public hearing: Once your elected officials call a public hearing to discuss your proposal, you will need to determine who will testify at the hearing and get others to attend. Work closely with the bill sponsor on how best to present your case to legislators. The sponsor may recommend limiting the number of speakers.

Plan ahead of time to make sure that everyone does not speak on the exact same points (a common problem at public hearings). You most likely will have very limited time (probably only three to five minutes per person), so dividing talking points among a handful of speakers can ensure that all of your key arguments are heard. It is especially influential if wildlife scientists are able to speak on such topics as the benefits of the proposed ban, the ineffectiveness of killing native carnivores to try to increase game species like deer and turkeys, and the importance of those native carnivores to the state's ecosystem. Predatory-friendly ranchers, subsistence hunters and representatives of the outdoor recreation industry are other important constituencies.

Also, it is a good idea to make sure the elected officials can readily identify those in attendance who are in support of the bill. Create stickers or buttons for people to wear, or matching T-shirts with messages that state support for the measure.

The bill's sponsor may also ask you to be available, as the subject matter expert, to answer any questions that come up during the committee hearing.

Follow up after the hearing: Oftentimes, an issue is not voted on in its first public hearing. During the hearing, take careful notes on who speaks in opposition to the bill, what their arguments are and how the elected officials respond to them. Also note what questions the elected officials ask. This will help you provide information to

legislators following the hearing to help alleviate any specific concerns that may result in them opposing the bill. Check in with the sponsor of the legislation to debrief about the public hearing and decide on what steps to take next.

The legislative process in your state may require the bill to pass several committees. Ultimately, the full Senate and Assembly/House will need to vote on the bill. If the bill passes both chambers, it will go to the governor for a signature.

Lobby the governor: Once the bill is on the governor's desk, he or she will sign it into law or veto it (in some states, the bill will go into effect if the governor takes no action). Consult with your bill sponsor to determine whether outreach to the governor is necessary. Sometimes it may require a full-force public outreach campaign; other times, the best approach might be outreach by a few key stakeholders.

Celebrate or regroup: If you win, celebrate! Have your coalition members and supporters reach out to their lawmakers and the governor to thank them for ending killing contests. But bear in mind that the campaign may not yet be over. While careful legislative drafting is key to ensuring that a bill survives any lawsuits, it is important to monitor and consult with experts on any legal challenges in the courts or further action by the legislature.

If the bill fails to pass, take all you have learned during the campaign and put it to good use when you try again. It can often take several attempts before legislation is successful, so do not be discouraged if your first effort fails—keep in mind that wildlife advocates in New Mexico and Arizona toiled for many years before their killing contest bans were finally enacted in 2019. Talk to legislators who opposed the bill, and discuss what changes could be made to garner their support for a future bill. Remember that regardless of the outcome, you educated many people with your message. Public education is critical to the success of any animal welfare campaign and, over time, an educated public can push for positive changes in the lives of animals.

Here is an example of a 2019 resolution passed by the Pima County, Arizona, Board of Supervisors, opposing wildlife killing contests and urging the Arizona Game and Fish Commission to ban them statewide (which it soon did):

RESOLUTION NO. ____

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE ARIZONA GAME AND FISH COMMISSION'S PROPOSED NEW RULE TO BAN WILDLIFE-KILLING CONTESTS

WHEREAS, the Arizona Game and Fish Department is responsible for conserving wildlife for the benefit of Arizona residents, and

WHEREAS, wildlife-killing contests are not "management tools" driven by science and they disrupt Arizona Game and Fish Department efforts to manage wildlife using sound scientific principles, and

WHEREAS, wildlife-killing contests are unethical blood sports as they promote the indiscriminate killing of as many animals as possible, and

WHEREAS, wildlife-killing contests violate the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and serve no reasonable purpose, and

WHEREAS, wildlife-killing contests are not legitimate hunting because contest participants do not eat the animals they kill and because the contests are unsporting – they do not follow the principles of fair chase, often employing electronic call devices or attractants to lure animals into shooting range, and

WHEREAS, wildlife-killing contests are a danger to our public lands and to people and domestic animals that use them for recreation or forage, and

WHEREAS, the zeal of wildlife-killing contestants can jeopardize threatened or endangered species in the areas where contests take place, and

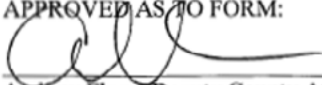
WHEREAS, wildlife-killing contests reflect poorly on the overall hunting community, stirring public outrage that has the potential to threaten hunting as a legitimate wildlife-management function,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Pima County Board of Supervisors hereby supports the Arizona Game and Fish Commission's proposal to amend its Rule under ARTICLE 3. TAKING AND HANDLING OF WILDLIFE, R12-4-303, to ban wildlife killing contests in this state and submits this resolution for the record.

Passed by the Board of Supervisors of Pima County, this ____ day of _____, 2019.

Richard Elías, Chairman
Pima County Board of Supervisors

ATTEST: _____
Julie Castañeda, Clerk of the Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM:


Andrew Flagg, Deputy County Attorney

Appendix

SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITORS (LTES)

THESE SAMPLES CAN BE USED FOR INSPIRATION, but do not copy and submit these samples verbatim. Newspapers prefer to print letters that are unique submissions to their publication. To have the most impact, be sure to include additional details with specifics about wildlife killing contests in your community. You can tailor your letters using the facts and talking points provided throughout this guide.

LTE #1: CANCEL WILDLIFE KILLING CONTEST EVENT [GENERAL]

It is shameful that [ORGANIZATION] is hosting a [SPECIFIC SPECIES or WILDLIFE] killing contest on [DAY AND DATE].

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase and respect for animals and their habitats. Sponsors and organizers of the event reward contestants with cash and prizes for killing the most or the largest animals. Competitive and indiscriminate killing of wildlife for “fun” or prizes is unethical.

Participants often use high-tech equipment such as powerful guns and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events—left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often tossed away like trash.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives our state’s hunters a bad name and sends a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays.

What’s more, research and empirical evidence has shown that randomly killing vital wild carnivores will not prevent conflicts with farm animals and will not increase numbers of deer or turkeys for hunters.

[ORGANIZATION] should cancel this reprehensible event.

LTE #2: CANCEL COYOTE KILLING CONTEST EVENT [COYOTE-SPECIFIC]

It is shameful that [ORGANIZATION] is hosting a coyote killing contest on [DAY AND DATE].

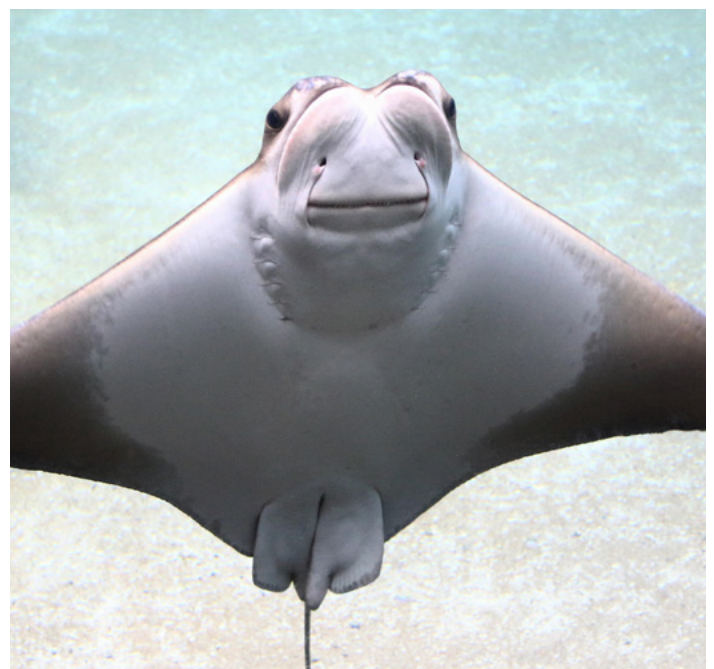
Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel, and they violate the hunting principles of fair chase and respect for animals and their

habitats. Sponsors and organizers of the event reward contestants with cash and prizes for killing the most animals or the largest animal. Competitive and indiscriminate killing of wildlife for “fun” or prizes is unethical.

Killing coyotes disrupts their social structure, which encourages more breeding and migration, and in the end results in more coyotes. Participants may also kill the more mature pack members who would pass down appropriate hunting behavior and knowledge to younger animals, increasing the likelihood that adolescent animals will prey on easy targets like farm animals just to survive. Coyotes also provide a range of benefits to our communities, including reducing rodent and rabbit populations. Studies show that coyotes balance their ecosystems by indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye and sends a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays.

[ORGANIZATION] should cancel this reprehensible event.





LTE #3: PASS LEGISLATION TO BAN WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

Most people are shocked to learn that wildlife killing contests—a blood sport akin to dogfighting—occur right here in our state. In these nefarious contests, participants compete to kill the most or the largest animals for cash or prizes. Cruel and unsporting, these contests target historically stigmatized species because there are almost no laws protecting them. Participants also perpetuate baseless myths about the targeted animals, including often-misunderstood and stigmatized coyotes, to justify the bloodshed.

Wildlife killing contests are out of step with science and are counterproductive to sound wildlife management. Randomly killing species like coyotes will not prevent conflicts with farm animals or pets, and may even increase them. It also won't reduce coyote numbers or result in more deer or turkeys for hunters. What's more, wildlife killing contests damage the reputation of the hunting community. It's just killing for "fun," bragging rights and cash, which is unacceptable to most people in our state. [STATE] should join other states—including Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—that have banned these events in recent years. Please encourage your state legislator to pass [BILL NUMBER] to outlaw this horrific blood sport.

SAMPLE OPINION PIECES (OP-EDS)

THESE SAMPLES CAN BE USED FOR INSPIRATION, but do not copy and submit these samples verbatim. Newspapers prefer to print op-eds that are unique submissions to their publication. To have the most impact, be sure to include additional details with specifics about wildlife killing contests in your community. Tailor your op-ed using the facts and talking points provided throughout this guide.

OP-ED #1: CANCEL WILDLIFE KILLING CONTEST EVENT [GENERAL]

[ORGANIZATION] is hosting a [SPECIES] killing contest on [DAY AND DATE]. In wildlife killing contests, contestants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem. [ORGANIZATION] should put an end to this blot on our community.

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair

advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most or the heaviest animals, participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful guns and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once participants receive their prizes, they often toss out the bodies of the animals like trash.

These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions, threatening the reputation of the hunting community. They glorify killing for killing's sake and send a dangerous message to the younger generation of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Let's be clear: Some so-called "traditions" need to fade away.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of this model hold that the commercialization of wildlife should be eliminated, that animals should only be killed for legitimate, nonfrivolous reasons, and that science should guide wildlife conservation decisions. Indiscriminate killing of wildlife for prizes and bragging rights violates these tenets. These shameful contests are the very definition of casual killing.

Wildlife killing contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. Animals deemed to be "pests" are the most common victims of killing contests because there are almost no laws protecting them. But a 2016 study published in the journal *Biological Conservation*, called "Changes in attitudes toward animals in the United States from 1978 to 2014," shows that American attitudes toward animals—especially historically stigmatized animals such as wolves or coyotes—have changed in a positive overall trend in the last several decades. Attitudes toward coyotes, one of the most misunderstood and persecuted species in the United States and the most frequent victims of killing contests, were significantly more positive, increasing by 47% among those surveyed in 2014. Overall, coyotes are generally well liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife are held, according to the NAMWC—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Additionally, wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. Some species respond with an increase in numbers, so that their population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the role that all native species play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable—such as competitions to kill animals for prizes.

Pictures on social media of stacks of bloody carcasses send the wrong message about our state to the rest of the country. Like

dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated by a modern society.

In the interest of creating a more humane community, the unethical, unscientific and ineffective [EVENT] should be canceled.

OP-ED #2: PASS LEGISLATION TO BAN WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

It's a horrible surprise to most people that wildlife killing contests are taking place in our state. In these contests, participants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most or the heaviest animals, or even the youngest or mangiest, in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem. We must put an end to this blot on our state.

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most or the heaviest animals, contest participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful guns and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once participants receive their prizes, they often toss out the bodies of the animals like trash.

These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions, threatening the reputation of the hunting community. They promote violence and killing for killing's sake and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called "traditions" need to fade away.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of this model state that the commercialization of wildlife should be eliminated, that animals should only be killed for legitimate, nonfrivolous reasons, and that science should



guide wildlife conservation decisions. Indiscriminate killing of animals for prizes and bragging rights violates these tenets. Killing contests are the very definition of casual killing.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. A 2016 study published in the journal *Biological Conservation*, called “Changes in attitudes toward animals in the United States from 1978 to 2014,” shows that American attitudes toward animals have changed in a positive overall trend in the last several decades. Attitudes toward coyotes were significantly more positive, increasing by 47% among those surveyed in 2014. Overall, the survey found that coyotes are generally well liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife is held, according to the NAMWC—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

While coyotes are routinely and viciously persecuted in these events, public acceptance of coyotes and other wild animals is increasing. Animals who were once stigmatized, such as bats, sharks and coyotes, are now appreciated as critical components to a functioning ecosystem who are deserving of compassion and conservation, as opposed to a previous ethos of domination and mastery over wild animals.

Wildlife killing contests are counterproductive to conservation purposes. They are not an effective method for managing wildlife, yet contest organizers frequently try to justify their events with claims that they are doing a service by eliminating “varmints.” The best available science does not support misguided belief systems that “reducing predators” will boost ungulate herds like deer and elk or make farm animals safer.

Specifically, persecution of coyotes disrupts their social structure, which, ironically, encourages more breeding and migration and in the end results in more coyotes. Furthermore, indiscriminate killing of native carnivores fails to target specific animals with whom there is a conflict, and can actually lead to an increase in conflicts with farm animals. Finally, coyotes play an important role in controlling rodent populations. Instead of killing rodents with poisons or cruel traps, allowing coyotes to live on the land provides us with a cost-effective, natural control alternative.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the vital role that native carnivores play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable, such as competitions to kill animals for prizes.

Pictures on social media of stacks of bloody carcasses send the wrong message about our state to the rest of the country. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated by a modern society.

In the interest of creating a more humane community, [STATE]

should join the growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—that have banned wildlife killing contests.

SAMPLE LETTERS TO SPONSOR/HOST

LETTER TO SPONSOR/HOST [GENERAL]

[DATE]

[SPONSOR/HOST ADDRESS]

Dear [SPONSOR or HOST],

We noticed that you are a sponsor of the upcoming event [NAME OF KILLING CONTEST], scheduled for [DATE] in [TOWN], and are writing to ask you not to support this event in the future. Despite its innocuous-sounding name, this “contest” is simply a bloodbath for entertainment, with contestants competing for prize money to see who can kill the [EVENT DETAILS] in a specified period of time. We ask that you not sponsor future stagings of this event for the following reasons.

Wildlife killing contests are a far cry from traditional fair chase hunting, nor are they sound, science-based wildlife management. They create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed, and the population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest was conducted. And the random killing of wild carnivore species like coyotes will not prevent conflicts with farm animals, or result in more deer or turkeys for hunters.

These events glorify killing and violence and flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of hunting are to allow fair chase, not to use animals as live targets and to protect mothers and their dependent young. Cash awards, prizes and bragging rights are certainly not legitimate reasons to kill animals, and killing contests are the very definition of casual killing, which the NAMWC also condemns.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is unethical and out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests are not tolerated by a modern society.

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated, “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.” Similarly, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department said, “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.” In Massachusetts, the agency reasoned that its regulation “addressed public concerns that these hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminate killing of wildlife, inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation” and recognized that “public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting and undermine public support for hunting in general[.]” For these reasons, we ask that you not sponsor this cruel, pointless, unsporting and ecologically damaging event in the future. We thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[ORGANIZATION]

[CITY, TOWN]

LETTER TO SPONSOR/HOST [COYOTE]

[DATE]

[SPONSOR ADDRESS]

Dear [SPONSOR or HOST],

We noticed that you are a sponsor of the upcoming event [NAME OF KILLING CONTEST], scheduled for [DATE] in [TOWN], and are writing to ask you not to support this event in the future. Despite its innocuous-sounding name, this “contest” is simply a bloodbath for entertainment, with contestants competing for prize money to see who can kill the [EVENT DETAILS] in a specified period of time. By refusing to sponsor this event, we believe that you can help put an end to this blot on our community.

Wildlife killing contests are a far cry from traditional fair chase hunting, nor are they based on any sound, science-based wildlife management principles. While coyotes are routinely persecuted and exploited in these events, public acceptance of coyotes and other wild animals is increasing. Animals who were once stigmatized, such as bats, sharks, wolves and coyotes, are now appreciated as critical components of a functioning ecosystem who are deserving of compassion and conservation, as opposed to a previous ethos of domination and mastery over wild animals. This should be translated into rethinking organized killing contests of wild animals.

Research has also shown that randomly killing coyotes will not protect farm animals from conflicts, and will not result in more deer or turkeys for hunters. It also disrupts coyote social structure, which encourages more breeding and migration and in the end results in

more coyotes. Additionally, coyotes’ favorite prey consists of rodents and rabbits. Studies show that coyotes balance their ecosystems, such as by indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores, keeping rodent and rabbit populations in check, removing dead animals from the environment and protecting crops.

These events glorify killing and violence and flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of hunting are to allow fair chase, not to use animals as live targets and to protect mothers and their dependent young. Cash awards, prizes and bragging rights are certainly not legitimate reasons to kill animals. Wildlife killing contests are the very definition of casual killing, which the NAMWC condemns.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is unethical and out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests are not tolerated by a modern society.

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated, “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.” Similarly, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department said, “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.” In Massachusetts, the agency reasoned that its regulation “addressed public concerns that these hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminate killing of wildlife, inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation” and further recognized “that public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting and undermine public support for hunting in general[.]”

For these reasons, we ask that you do not sponsor this cruel, pointless and ecologically damaging event in the years ahead.

We thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[ORGANIZATION]

[CITY, TOWN]

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA ITEMS

SAMPLE FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM POSTS

Wildlife killing contests that offer cash and prizes for killing the most or the heaviest animals have no place in modern society. Please urge [HOST] to cancel [EVENT] in [TOWN] that will take place on [DATE]. #EndWildlifeKillingContests

[YOUR STATE LEGISLATURE] is considering a bill to ban wildlife killing contests in [YOUR STATE]. This cruel blood sport has no place in modern society, and especially not in our great state. Please urge your state legislators to vote YES on [BILL NUMBER]. #EndWildlifeKillingContests

SAMPLE TWEETS

Killing animals in contests for fun and prizes has no place in our society. Say “no” to [EVENT]. #EndWildlifeKillingContests

Urge [YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL] to OPPOSE wildlife killing contests in [YOUR STATE]. #EndWildlifeKillingContests

SAMPLE GRAPHICS TO GO ALONG WITH SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



#EndWildlifeKillingContests

Stop the competitive killing of wild animals for cash and prizes! Wildlife killing contests are cruel, ineffective at reducing conflicts with wildlife, and damage the reputation of hunters who abide by traditional hunting ethics.



#EndWildlifeKillingContests

Stop the competitive killing of wild animals for cash and prizes! Wildlife killing contests are cruel, ineffective at reducing conflicts with wildlife, and damage the reputation of hunters who abide by traditional hunting ethics.

Twidlife/Stockphoto

SAMPLE FACT SHEETS

FACT SHEET #1:

WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS ARE CRUEL AND INEFFECTIVE

Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is unethical and out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays.

Wildlife killing contests are a problem in our community

Every year, wild animals are killed for prizes and entertainment in killing contests in our state. At the [LOCAL EVENT NAME] in [LOCATION], participants compete to kill [SPECIES] for the prospect of winning [PRIZE INFO]. The goal is to kill [AS MANY ANIMALS AS POSSIBLE / THE HEAVIEST ANIMAL / ETC]. [ADD INFO ABOUT ANY CRUEL PRACTICES USED DURING THE HUNT OR OTHER DETAILS.]

Wildlife killing contests are nothing more than a blood sport

These events are similar to dogfighting or cockfighting, which have been outlawed in every state. They glorify killing and send a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun and that life is of little value. Wildlife killing contests are antithetical to hunting principles that dictate respect for wildlife and the environment. Participants in these horrific events are part of a small subculture rarely glimpsed by the general public.

Wildlife killing contests damage the reputation of hunters and threaten the future of hunting

These events glorify violence and flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of this model hold that the commercialization of wildlife should be eliminated, that animals should only be killed for legitimate, nonfrivolous reasons, and that science should guide wildlife conservation decisions. Indiscriminate killing of animals for prizes and bragging rights violates these tenets—these contests are the very definition of casual killing. Hunting ethics also dictate the principle of fair chase (that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the hunted) and that hunters should not use animals as live targets and should protect mothers and their dependent young.

Wildlife killing contests fail to address wildlife conflict issues and may increase problems

Participants in wildlife killing contests justify the bloodshed with baseless myths about “pest” species. But the best available science demonstrates that random and mass killing of vital native

wildlife species will not prevent conflicts with farm animals, nor will it increase numbers of deer or turkeys for hunters. It also fails to recognize the importance of all species in natural ecosystems. What’s more, wildlife killing contests can create wildlife management problems by disrupting the hierarchical order within wildlife family structures.

Wildlife killing contests are a blot on our state

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, far more tourism dollars are spent on wildlife watching and other ecotourism activities than on activities like wildlife killing contests. Those who value wildlife and respect nature abhor wildlife killing contests and will avoid locations that cater to that subculture.

Growing momentum to ban wildlife killing contests

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years. It’s time to close the history book on this blood sport. We must ban organizing, sponsoring, promoting, conducting or participating in any contest, competition, tournament or derby with the objective of killing wildlife for prizes or other inducement.

FACT SHEET #2:

END COYOTE KILLING CONTESTS

Thousands of coyotes die every year in wildlife killing contests—a little-known blood sport in which participants compete to kill the most or the largest coyote, or even the youngest or mangiest coyote, for cash or prizes. Coyotes are mercilessly killed during these events, their bodies weighed and counted, and then frequently dumped—no longer needed after the prizes have been awarded.

Cruel and unsporting

Mistakenly referred to by some as “pests,” coyotes are targeted during these events because there are almost no laws protecting them. Across the United States they can often be killed in unlimited numbers, all year long, and using almost any method. Participants frequently use high-tech equipment that gives them a significant advantage over the animal—a violation of the fundamental hunting ethic known as fair chase.

One of the most chilling aspects of coyote killing contests is the use of electronic calling devices to attract the animals into rifle range with sounds that imitate the cry of a coyote in distress. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear this cry for help, they come to investigate.

Manipulating animals' natural compassion to lure them into gun range is not hunting—it is a reprehensible practice condemned by hunters and nonhunters alike.

Dependent young may also be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure.

Baseless myths to justify the bloodshed

Shooters piously claim to be helping to protect farm animals or game species like deer by killing coyotes, but this is not supported by the best available science. Claims that coyotes attack children and pets, threaten farm animals and diminish populations of game animals that “belong” to hunters are greatly exaggerated and out of step with modern scientific understanding of the importance of coyotes and other native carnivores.

Counterproductive to sound wildlife management

Coyotes play a vital role in healthy ecosystems. They provide a number of free, natural ecological services: helping to control disease transmission, cleaning up carrion (animal carcasses), keeping rodent populations in check, increasing biodiversity, removing sick animals from the gene pool and protecting crops.

Indiscriminate killing of native carnivores like coyotes may reduce their populations temporarily, but the best available science demonstrates that these species will respond with an increase in numbers. Wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. In the case of coyotes, this disruption allows more coyotes to reproduce and can increase conflicts with farm animals.



Wildlife killing contests damage the reputation of hunters and threaten the future of hunting

These events glorify violence and flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of this model hold that the commercialization of wildlife should be eliminated, that animals should only be killed for legitimate, nonfrivolous reasons, and that science should guide wildlife conservation decisions. Indiscriminate killing of animals for prizes and bragging rights violates these tenets—these contests are the very definition of casual killing. Hunting ethics also dictate the principle of fair chase (that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the hunted) and that hunters should not use animals as live targets and should protect mothers and their dependent young.

Growing momentum to ban wildlife killing contests

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years.

Like dogfighting, coyote killing contests should be banned

Cockfighting and dogfighting have been banned in all 50 states and so, too, should these contests. Though coyotes are a historically stigmatized species, a recent study by researchers at Ohio State University found that between 1978 and 2014, positive attitudes toward coyotes grew by 47 percent, with the majority of respondents expressing positive attitudes toward coyotes.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and our community a black eye. Our state should ban the organizing, sponsoring, promoting, conducting or participating in any contest, competition, tournament or derby with the objective of killing wildlife for prizes or other inducements.

SAMPLE TESTIMONY

THERE IS NORMALLY A TIME LIMIT OF ABOUT THREE MINUTES for oral testimony in meetings of commissions and councils, so please keep your remarks brief and concise. Check with the commission or council for meeting guidelines. You might also coordinate with other advocates to ensure that you don't duplicate each other's testimony and instead each focus on a specific topic. For example, one person can talk about how wildlife killing contests are cruel, another can focus on the lack of science supporting the contests and another can focus on how the contests violate the principles of sportsmanship and fair chase in hunting.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF A BILL TO BAN GENERAL WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I respectfully urge you to support [BILL NUMBER], an act to prohibit wildlife killing contests in [STATE].

As a resident of [LOCALITY], I was disturbed to learn that a wildlife killing contest called the [EVENT NAME] is being conducted right here in my community. I, and many other citizens and community leaders, ask that you pass [BILL NUMBER] to end these cruel spectacles.

Participants in wildlife killing contests compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most or the heaviest animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem.

Wildlife killing contests are also unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most or the heaviest animals, participants often use high-tech equipment such as powerful guns, scopes and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of prey or a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often tossed away like trash.

These killing contests flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. A recent study by Ohio State University shows that American attitudes toward animals—especially historically stigmatized animals such as coyotes—have greatly improved in the last several decades. Overall, coyotes are generally well liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife is held—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Additionally, wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. Some species respond with an increase in numbers, so that their population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest.

And finally, wildlife killing contests are not based on any sound, science-based wildlife management principles. Numerous research studies have found that the random and indiscriminate killing of native

carnivores like coyotes will not reduce their numbers—in fact it could increase them by destabilizing their breeding structure—nor will it protect farm animals from conflicts or increase numbers of game species like deer or turkeys. I firmly believe that our state’s wildlife should be managed according to the best available science, and wildlife killing contests are about as far from science as you can get.

We should also consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the role that all native species play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable, such as competitions for killing the most animals.

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated, “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.” Similarly, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department said, “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.” In Massachusetts, the agency reasoned that its regulation “addressed public concerns that these hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminate killing of wildlife, inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.”

In the interest of creating a more humane state, I ask that you vote yes for [BILL NUMBER]. Your support will send a powerful message that [STATE] residents care about the responsible, science-based conservation of our natural resources and protecting our wildlife from cruelty. Thank you for your time.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF A BILL TO BAN COYOTE KILLING CONTESTS

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME] and I live in [LOCALITY]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I respectfully urge you to support [BILL NUMBER], an act to prohibit coyote killing contests in [STATE].

In these contests, participants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most or the heaviest animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of wildlife is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem. We should put an end to this blot on our state.

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of



fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most or the heaviest animals, contest participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful guns, scopes and electronic calling devices that lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of prey or a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often thrown away like trash.

These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. They glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. A 2016 study published in the journal *Biological Conservation* found that American attitudes toward coyotes have significantly improved in the last few decades. Overall, the survey found that coyotes are generally well liked. This goes to show that the American public recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Wildlife killing contests are also not effective at managing wildlife. The best available science does not support misguided belief systems that “reducing predators” will boost game species like deer, elk or turkeys, or will make farm animals safer. On the contrary, wild carnivores help to maintain a robust and healthy population of prey species.

The persecution of coyotes will only get you more coyotes. That’s because it disrupts their social structure, which, ironically, encourages

more breeding and migration and in the end increases their numbers. Furthermore, indiscriminate killing of native carnivores fails to target specific animals who are causing problems and can actually lead to an increase in conflicts with farm animals. Research has also shown that nonlethal methods to protect farm animals from predation are highly effective and more economical. Finally, coyotes play a large role in controlling rodent populations and other species that damage crops and may harbor ticks and tick-borne diseases like Lyme.

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated, “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.” Similarly, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department said, “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.” In Massachusetts, the agency reasoned that its regulation “addressed public concerns that these hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminate killing of wildlife, inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.”

Unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship and are an embarrassment to [STATE]. In the interest of creating a more humane community, I ask that you vote yes for [BILL NUMBER]. Thank you.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF A BAN ON COYOTE KILLING CONTESTS FROM WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT EXPERTS

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I respectfully urge you to support [BILL NUMBER], an act to prohibit coyote killing contests in [STATE].

I would like to address some of the misinformation about the effectiveness of these contests, which are actually counterproductive to conservation purposes. Contest organizers may try to justify their actions with claims that they are doing a service by eliminating “varmints,” or that killing coyotes and other native carnivores will somehow boost ungulate species like deer and elk, or bird species like turkeys, or will make farm animals safer. But those claims are not supported by the best available, peer-reviewed science, as the following statements from those with experience in wildlife management will attest to.

In 2019 Mike Finley, hunter and chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, stated: “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.”

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department stated in 2018: “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 land for all hunters.”

After reviewing a large body of science, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission found that: “While coyote population reduction (‘coyote control’) is often the first and only management approach that people suggest, it has proven ineffective.”

According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission: “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.”

In its policy statement on killing contests, the Wildlife Society—an organization that represents wildlife professionals—stated: “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.” It went on to “recognize that there is little evidence to support the use of killing contests for controlling predator populations.”

In Massachusetts, after analyzing the science, the agency reasoned that its regulation to ban killing contests “addressed public concerns that these hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminate killing of wildlife, inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.”

In 2016, the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners stated that, “[T]he wildlife management profession does not generally recognize the use of contests as a tool with substantial wildlife management effect.”

Michael Sutton, former president of the California Fish and Game Commission, has said, “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.”

More than 70 leading carnivore and conservation scientists have [signed a statement](#)⁵³ condemning wildlife killing contests on ecological grounds, finding that these events do not decrease conflicts between coyotes and farm animals and may even increase problems; are not a reliable means of increasing populations of game species like deer; and are not necessary to prevent coyote populations from growing.

I and so many other citizens of [STATE] trust our wildlife agency

professionals and scientists. These unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship or proper stewardship of our wildlife and ecosystems.

With this in mind, I ask that you vote yes for [BILL NUMBER]. Thank you.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF A BAN ON COYOTE KILLING CONTESTS FROM SCIENTISTS

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I respectfully urge you to support [BILL NUMBER], an act to prohibit cruel and ineffective wildlife killing contests in [STATE].

Some killing contest organizers or participants may try to justify their actions by claiming that killing coyotes and other native carnivores will somehow reduce coyote numbers, boost populations of popular game species like deer, elk or turkeys, or make farm animals safer. But those claims are simply not supported by the best available, peer-reviewed science.

In fact, in a letter dated 2020, more than 70 preeminent scientists across North America called for a prohibition on wildlife killing contests. They stated: “The most general reason to prohibit WKC [wildlife killing contests] is that hunters and wildlife managers believe, as a community, that killing animals without an adequate reason is unjustified and unsportsmanlike. Killing an animal for a prize or trophy constitutes killing without an adequate reason.” And the scientists added, “There is no credible evidence that indiscriminate killing of coyotes or other predators effectively serves any genuine interest in managing other species.”

As to whether wildlife killing contests decrease the loss of farm animals to depredation by carnivores, the scientists continued: “[A] great deal of science has been developed on how to effectively manage depredations, including both lethal and non-lethal methods. Lessons from that science include: (i) indiscriminate killing is ineffective and it is plausible, perhaps likely, that when associated with a WKC it would lead to increased risk of depredations. A primary reason for this concern is that only some, often only a few, individual predators participate in depredation. Indiscriminate and ‘pre-emptive’ killing of predators associated with WKC can lead to the disruption of predators’ social structure and foraging ecology in ways that increase the likelihood of depredations. ... (ii) The indiscriminate killing associated with a WKC does not target: (a) the offending predator, (b) the site where depredation has occurred, and (c) the time when depredation has occurred. This renders WKC ineffective as a means of depredation control.”

And regarding the claim that wildlife killing contests will somehow increase the abundance of prey species, like deer, for hunters, the scientists say in their letter: “[A] large body of science indicates that

killing predators, especially under circumstances associated with WKC, is not a reliable means of increasing ungulate abundance. ... Even when predators are killed to the point of impairing the ecosystem services, there is still no assurance that ungulate abundance will increase. The reason being is that ungulate abundance is frequently limited by factors other than predators—factors such as habitat and climate.”

With all of this in mind, I ask you to support [BILL NUMBER], an act to prohibit wildlife killing contests in [STATE], because they are cruel, ineffective and are not consistent with sound scientific wildlife management principles. Thank you.

SAMPLE LETTER TO POLICYMAKERS

YOU CAN ADAPT THIS SAMPLE LETTER to send to your lawmakers asking them to support a ban on wildlife killing contests.

Dear [LEGISLATOR]:

As a resident of [LOCALITY] and your constituent, I respectfully ask that you support [BILL NUMBER], an act to prohibit wildlife killing contests in [STATE]. Continuing to allow such events is quite simply an embarrassment for our great state.

In wildlife killing contests, contestants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most or the heaviest animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of our state’s wildlife is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem.

In particular, right here in our community, [SHARE DETAILS OF THE LOCAL WILDLIFE KILLING CONTEST, INCLUDING NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS, METHODS OF KILLING WILDLIFE, PRIZES OFFERED AND FOR WHAT—HEAVIEST COYOTE, ETC.—AND WHAT LOCAL BUSINESSES SPONSORED THE EVENT].

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most animals, participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful guns and scopes, and electronic calling devices that lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of prey or a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often tossed away like trash.

These killing contests flout sportsmanship ethics and our state’s treasured outdoors legacy, and instead glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters



who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. The most common victims of killing contests are those deemed to be “pests” because there are almost no laws protecting them. But a 2016 study by Ohio State University shows that American attitudes toward animals—especially historically stigmatized animals such as coyotes—have changed in a positive overall trend in the last several decades. Overall, coyotes are generally well liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife is held—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Additionally, wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. Some species respond with an increase in numbers, so that their population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the role that all native species play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable, such as competitions for killing the most animals.

Newspaper pictures of stacks of bloody carcasses send the wrong message about our [LOCALITY] to the rest of the country. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated by a modern society.

Wildlife management agencies and lawmakers in a growing number of states—including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington—have banned killing contests in recent years. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated, “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.” Similarly, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department said, “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.” In Massachusetts, the agency reasoned that its regulation “addressed public concerns that these hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminate killing of wildlife, inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.”

Unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship. In the interest of creating a more humane community, I ask that you vote yes for [BILL NUMBER]. Your support will send a powerful message that [STATE] cares about the responsible management of our state’s natural resources and protecting our wildlife from cruelty. Thank you for your consideration.

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