

Dear Chair Holvey and Members of the House Committee On Rules:

I am writing to urge you to support SB 723 B, a bill to ban coyote killing contests in Oregon.

This bill does not impact fishing derbies or the training of hunting dogs. It does not prevent coyotes from being trapped for fur or simply shot on sight because they are considered vermin. It does not prevent misguided lethal coyote control efforts which science shows only increases conflicts with humans.

To be honest, this bill would do little to protect coyotes.

This is largely a symbolic bill where Oregonians say, "We value and respect all living things in our state".

To allow killing contests to continue would be a black eye for our state, especially as other states are banning this practice.

A review of the science and observations in the field make it clear that there are no positive biological reasons for maintaining coyote killing contests in Oregon.

Coyote killing contests have not increased the chances of antelope and mule deer fawn survival or nesting success of sage grouse.

All publicly-advertised coyote killing contests in Oregon since 2014 have been held in late fall or early winter. Because coyotes killed during contests were likely replaced by nearby coyotes within a few weeks (Blejwas et al. 2002), killing contests have not increased the springtime survival of antelope and deer fawns or sage grouse nestlings.

Coyote killing contests do not help farmers by reducing livestock depredations.

In a 14-year USDA study at the University of California Hopland Research and Extension Center (Conner et al. 1998), researchers found that killing coyotes did not reduce sheep losses. The unexpected results in these studies can be explained by the reproductive strategy and territorial behavior of highly social predators like the coyote.

When coyotes are killed indiscriminately (kill non-offending individuals), coyotes compensate for reductions in population with increasing immigration, reproduction, and pup survival rates. In a New York Times article, University of Washington wildlife ecologist Laura Prugh explained, "Killing coyotes is kind of like mowing the lawn, it stimulates vigorous new growth." In order to sustain larger litters of pups, breeding adults are compelled to seek larger prey like sheep and goats.

There is a reason why USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services trappers have an old saying: "If you kill one coyote, two will come to its funeral."

Protecting livestock by using one coyote to repel another gave rise to an expression that makes predation management researchers chuckle: *guard coyote* (Shivik 2014, p. 74). But scientists are not the only ones who have observed that killing coyotes may increase livestock losses. Writer Michelle Canfield raises grass-fed lamb in the Snohomish River Valley and told the following story about "guard coyotes" in her blog after visiting Jon Carter, an advisor to the Oregon Pasture Network, at his farm in Scio, Oregon:

The more selection pressure they face, the more they rise to the challenge and increase reproduction. So the last thing we want to do is go on a killing spree; because the population responds exactly opposite to what we'd prefer. We kill one coyote, we might get three more vying for his spot in return. Indeed, this notion was confirmed by a man I met who ran guardian dogs with his sheep, and generally left well-behaved coyotes alone.

Jon discussed a bit on living in balance with coyotes, and how he used to feel tempted to shoot any coyote he saw. Until one day he shot a coyote in the distance that was minding its own business, during a period of time when he'd had almost zero sheep losses to predators. Lo and behold, the next few weeks, he started getting "hits" from a new coyote who had moved in to fill the now-dead coyote's niche. It convinced Jon to focus on only removing known problem coyotes, not all coyotes!

If a pair of coyotes is not killing livestock, their dominance over the territory typically excludes sheep-killing coyotes and helps to prevent livestock losses (Shivik et al. 2003). Protecting breeding pairs of “well-behaved” coyotes is one of the best reasons for not indiscriminately killing coyotes during contests.

It is clear that continuing to allow the dishonorable and indefensible practice of coyote killing contests will only serve to do two things:

- accelerate the decline in support for hunting by Oregonians
- increase conflict between livestock and coyotes in Oregon

Sincerely,

Randy Comeleo
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