

Dear Chair Witt and Committee Members:

As a co-founder and advisor to the Benton County Agriculture and Wildlife Protection Program ([AWPP](#)), I'm asking you to support HB 4075, a bill to ban coyote killing contests in Oregon.

During the development of the Benton County non-lethal wildlife deterrents grant program, I consulted with predation management scientists and carnivore ecologists from around the United States. I also interviewed many local farmers and have spoken with dozens more from all over Oregon at the annual OSU Small Farms Conference.

Proponents of wildlife killing contests argue that they help farmers by reducing livestock depredations. This claim is not supported by predation management science or the observations of most livestock producers.

One thing that both scientists and farmers have made clear to me is that randomly killing coyotes and other wild carnivores does little or nothing to reduce livestock depredations. In fact, they say that killing predators can have just the opposite effect.

A USDA-funded study ([Conner et al. 1998](#)) found that killing coyotes does not reduce sheep losses over the long term. When coyotes are killed indiscriminately (killing non-offending individuals), they compensate for reductions in population with increasing immigration, reproduction, and pup survival rates. Another USDA-funded study ([Blejwas et al. 2002](#)) found that coyotes that are killed can be replaced by nearby coyotes within a few weeks.

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.

Even coyote trappers have an old saying: "If you kill one coyote, two will come to its funeral."

Scientists and trappers are not the only ones who have observed that killing coyotes may increase livestock losses. Farmer Michelle Canfield wrote the following story about [coyotes](#) in her blog after visiting [Jon Carter](#) 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.

This bill will not prevent misguided lethal coyote control efforts which scientists and farmers say only increase conflicts with livestock. It will not prevent coyotes from being hunted, trapped for fur, or simply shot on sight because they are considered vermin.

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

Rather, this is a largely symbolic, yet very important, bill where Oregonians say, "We value and respect all wildlife in our state". Because wild animals stand mute and utterly powerless before us, ending coyote killing contests will be a test of our character, honorable conduct, and faithful stewardship of wildlife.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Randy Comeleo
Corvallis, OR

References

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