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<https://mailtribune.com/opinion/guest-opinions/oregon-should-ban-coyote-killing-contests>

Oregon should ban coyote-killing contests

by Mike Finley

Sunday, February 9th 2020

As a lifelong sportsman and conservationist, and as former chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, I'm glad to see that a new bill, HB 4075, has been introduced to ban coyote-killing contests in Oregon. Killing large numbers of predators as part of an organized contest is inconsistent with sound, science-based wildlife management and antithetical to the concepts of sportsmanship and fair chase.

I'm a hunter myself, and I'm proud of the key role the hunting community plays in conserving our state's wildlife. These killing contests, however, are not responsible hunting and are nothing more than target practice, using live animals. They glorify killing for its own sake and cast Oregon's entire hunting community in a bad light. If we want to preserve hunting for the sake of future generations, we must be mindful of how our activities are perceived by the non-hunters. The sight of contest participants mugging for the camera next to piles of dead animals is sure to turn more Oregonians against all hunting.

Oregon has adopted the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation that includes as a core principle that wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose. Under the North American Model, wildlife is a shared resource that must not be wasted, and wildlife should

never be killed for frivolous reasons. These killing contests, by contrast, are nothing but wanton waste and remove animals from the populations that are not known to be a problem and are simply performing their ecological role. That is why most state wildlife agencies, including ODFW, haven't supported or promoted killing contests as a responsible wildlife management tool.

Killing large numbers of coyotes is more than just repugnant to most Oregonians; it is also counterproductive. It is well known that coyotes are a highly adaptive species that respond to efforts to exterminate them by increasing their rates of reproduction. Like all native carnivores, coyotes are important to their ecosystem and help to keep their natural prey species, especially rodents and small mammals, in check. When large numbers of them are removed, those species will become overabundant and cause even more problems for people.

During my tenure as chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, I would have been more than happy to address killing contests at the regulatory level. But unlike other states, our commission is actually prohibited by law from regulating species classified as "predatory"—including coyotes. It's therefore up to the Oregon Legislature to make this crucial decision.

I grew up hunting in Oregon and have dedicated my entire career to the idea that all wildlife, including coyotes, deserve to be managed respectfully and according to the best available science. HB 4075 is a step in the right direction and will rid Oregon of these pointless, wasteful, and unsporting coyote-killing contests.

I ask our state legislators to take swift and decisive action to move this bill forward. It's the right thing to do for Oregon's native wildlife species, and for our state's proud tradition of sportsmanship and conservation ethics.

Mike Finley of Medford is the former chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.