

Dear Chair Witt and Committee Members:

I am a co-founder of and advisor to the Benton County Agriculture and Wildlife Protection Program ([AWPP](#)). This county program provides grant funds to farmers for the purchase of wildlife deterrents such as livestock guardian animals, electrified fencing, scare devices, and protective housing. I am writing to ask you to support HB 2728, a bill to ban coyote killing contests in Oregon.

During the development of the Benton County grant program, we consulted with predation management scientists and wildlife ecologists from around the United States. We also interviewed many local farmers and have spoken with dozens more from all over Oregon at the annual Oregon State University [Small Farms Conference](#).

While proponents of coyote killing contests argue that they help farmers by reducing livestock depredations, scientists and farmers we've spoken with have told us that randomly killing coyotes does little or nothing to reduce livestock losses.

What's worse, scientists and farmers have told us that randomly killing coyotes can actually increase the killing of livestock.

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.

In a New York Times [article](#), University of Washington wildlife scientist 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."

Another USDA-funded study ([Blejwas et al. 2002](#)) of 66 radio-collared coyotes – coyotes whose locations could be followed - found that coyotes that are killed can be replaced by nearby coyotes within a few days.

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.

Scientists and farmers have made it clear that coyote killing contests only increase conflict between livestock and coyotes in Oregon. If you really want to help Oregon ranchers, I urge you to support HB 2728 and programs that promote the use of non-lethal wildlife deterrents to protect livestock.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Randy Comeleo
Corvallis, OR

References

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