



The Hidden War on Wildlife:

KILLING CONTESTS IN NORTH AMERICA

Wildlife killing contests violate the public trust doctrine, which maintains that wildlife is a public trust asset that must be conserved and protected for future generations.

What are Wildlife Killing Contests?

Most Americans are shocked to learn that thousands of coyotes, mountain lions, foxes, bobcats, prairie dogs, crows, and even wolves are targeted each year in wildlife killing contests where contestants win prizes for killing the most or largest of a given species. Many non-target species, including pets and endangered species, are killed or injured as collateral damage. These contests (also called derbies and drives), which are largely unmonitored by state and federal wildlife agencies, are legal in every state in the U.S. except California and often occur on our public lands.

Wildlife killing contests violate the public trust doctrine, which maintains that wildlife is a public trust asset that must be conserved and protected for future generations. The contests are symptomatic of a larger problem with state wildlife agency mismanagement of predators, and an arcane prejudice against native carnivores that is rooted in fear and misunderstanding. The belief that killing unlimited numbers of native carnivores is a legitimate form of wildlife management is perpetuated by special interest groups – hunters, trappers and agricultural lobby groups – and exists, in large part, because it is considered more expedient to kill wildlife than to implement responsible, science-based conservation and management.

Who Participates in Wildlife Killing Contests?

A very small segment of the population participates in the contests. However, there are efforts underway by this small community to expand their numbers by pursuing youngsters. Children as young as ten are encouraged to participate, and social media pages show them posing with rifles beside the bodies of the animals they killed. These contests send a chilling message that killing is fun, that life is cheap, and that wild animals are disposable.

Wildlife Killing Contests are Unethical and Disrupt Wildlife Ecology

Wildlife killing contests are counterproductive to sound wildlife conservation or management. These contests can create instability and social chaos in the family structures of the animals who are killed, often leaving orphaned young to die and killing the experienced individuals who would pass down appropriate hunting behavior and knowledge to younger animals. Left on their own, adolescent animals are more likely to prey on livestock just to survive. The use of lures and distress calls to attract target animals removes any notion of fair chase in these cruel and unethical events.



Coyote Pups by © John Harrison



Poster advertising a killing contest by Jim Larrison (CC BY 2.0)



Dead Coyotes by Shannon (CC BY NC ND 2.0)

Why Wildlife Killing Contests Must End

Wildlife killing contests are symptomatic of mismanagement by state wildlife agencies and serve no ecological purpose. Far from offering beneficial management, wildlife killing contests promote gratuitous violence, resulting in the destruction of countless ecologically vital native predators, such as coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats and wolves.

What Project Coyote is Doing to End Wildlife Killing Contests

We have an opportunity to change policy at the local and state level by educating citizens and policymakers about the cruelty of wildlife killing contests and the ecological value of native predators. Project Coyote is working to Expose, Educate, Empower and End wildlife killing contests. Milestones & actions underway:

- Project Coyote spearheaded a successful grassroots campaign that banned the awarding of prizes and inducements for killing non-game and furbearing mammals in California in 2014.

- Project Coyote and allies are engaged in legal action against the Bureau of Land Management for allowing wildlife killing contests on public lands.
- In the fall of 2015, the Nevada Wildlife Alliance (of which Project Coyote is a member) pressed for a ban on coyote killing contests before the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commission. While the Commission failed to support the petition, momentum is building to seek a legislative ban on killing contests in the state.
- In New Mexico, a coalition of wildlife conservation organizations is working to prohibit wildlife killing contests through the legislature. A bill in 2015 made it through the senate but died in the House Agriculture Committee. The coalition is continuing to build momentum for a statewide ban.
- In 2014, Project Coyote and the Animal Legal Defense Fund successfully shut down the annual JMK Coyote Hunting Contest in Harney County, Oregon – one of the state's largest coyote killing contests.

- Project Coyote is producing a documentary film featuring scientists, ranchers, advocates and government officials to expose killing contests, raise awareness of their ecological consequences, and inspire action. The film will debunk myths used to perpetuate these contests and will highlight successful efforts to ban them.
- Project Coyote's Keeping It Wild youth program encourages young people to lend their voices to actions to protect wildlife. Young people played a key role in our successful campaign in California to close killing contest loopholes.

What you can do:

With your help, we will continue to fight against killing contests and build support for peaceful coexistence through the courts, the legislature, and in communities across North America.

Join us at Project Coyote and get involved!

Visit: ProjectCoyote.org

ProjectCoyote.org

PROJECT COYOTE

P.O. BOX 5007, LARKSPUR, CA, 94977



**PROMOTING COEXISTENCE
BETWEEN PEOPLE & WILDLIFE THROUGH
EDUCATION, SCIENCE & ADVOCACY**