

A BARBARIC BLOODSPORT: End Wildlife Killing Contests



Photo © Humane Society of the United States/ Marc Ayers



“Wildlife killing contests are symptomatic of a broader problem of misguided wildlife governance by state agencies that fails to recognize and value the crucial ecological roles of native predators.”

- Dave Parsons, MS

Wildlife biologist & Project Coyote Science Advisory Board member

ABOUT

Most Americans are shocked to learn that thousands of animals die every year in wildlife killing contests—barbaric events in which participants win prizes for killing the greatest number or the largest of a given wildlife species. Bobcats, cougars, coyotes, foxes, porcupines, prairie dogs, rabbits, raccoons, and even wolves die in these tournaments. Coyotes are the most common victims. Following the weekend-long events—such as the “Coyote Crush” in Indiana or the “Squirrel Slam” in New York—participants gather at check-in locations to celebrate and count the slaughtered animals. State and federal wildlife agencies do not monitor the contests, which are legal in nearly every state.

“[T]hese kinds of competitive coyote hunts are raising concerns on the part of the public and could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.”

~ Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

ProjectCoyote.org

PROJECT COYOTE

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

A BLOODSPORT LIKE DOGFIGHTING

Wildlife killing contests are no different than dogfighting and cockfighting, which have been outlawed nationwide. A 2018 undercover investigation by the Humane Society of the United States showed wildlife killing contest participants piling up coyotes and foxes they had killed to be judged for prizes, and laughing and posing for photos in front of the dead animals. In many contests, young children are encouraged to participate, and hunting equipment and high-powered rifles—including AR-15s—are awarded as raffle prizes.

CRUEL AND UNSPORTING

Countless animals may be injured or orphaned during these events. Participants often use electronic calling devices that mimic the sounds of prey or coyotes in distress, thereby manipulating animals' natural curiosity or compassion to lure them in for an easy kill. Killing contests are condemned by sportsmen because they violate fundamental hunting ethics.

MYTHS FUEL THE KILLING

Killing contest organizers perpetuate myths to demonize coyotes, and other persecuted wildlife, claiming that their events will reduce conflicts with wildlife. Scientific studies refute this claim. There is no evidence that killing coyotes, for example, permanently limits coyote populations, increases the number of deer or other game species for hunters, or reduces conflicts with humans, pets or livestock.

CONTRARY TO MODERN, SCIENCE-BASED WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Randomly killing coyotes in wildlife killing contests may increase coyote populations and lead to more conflicts. Coyotes self-regulate their populations when left alone, but lethal control can disrupt pack structure, allowing more coyotes to reproduce and increasing pup survival due to decreased competition for food and habitat. Contestants may also kill the more mature pack members who would pass down appropriate hunting behavior and knowledge to younger animals, increasing the likelihood that adolescent animals will prey on easy targets like livestock just to survive.

A SYMPTOM OF MISGUIDED WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE

Coyotes and other wildlife targeted in killing contests receive almost no protections under the law because they are deemed vermin—a view perpetuated by special-interest agricultural and trophy hunting groups. This attitude persists in part because it is considered more expedient to kill animals than to implement responsible, science-based conservation and stewardship. State wildlife management agencies— beholden to these interest groups because they rely on them for funding—provide almost no protections to persecuted animals. In most states, coyotes can be killed year-round and using almost any method.

DESTRUCTIVE TO HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS

Coyotes, for example, provide a range of benefits including controlling rabbit and rodent populations, restricting rodent-borne disease transmission, cleaning up dead animal carcasses, and limiting populations of mesocarnivores—including raccoons, skunks and foxes—that prey on songbirds and consume their eggs.

A VIOLATION OF THE PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE

Wildlife killing contests are a violation of the Public Trust Doctrine, a foundational judicial principle mandating that governments hold natural assets, including wildlife, in trust for the general public and future generations. Allowing a minority of the population to kill animals en masse contravenes the rights of the majority of Americans, who value the intrinsic, ecological and aesthetic value of native carnivores, and damages the reputation of state wildlife management agencies and sportsmen alike.

OUTLAWING WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

Arizona and Massachusetts prohibited wildlife killing contests for predatory and furbearing species in 2019. New Mexico and Vermont outlawed coyote killing contests in 2019 and 2018, respectively. In 2014, California banned the awarding of prizes for killing furbearing and nongame species. The New Mexico State Land Commissioner prohibited killing contests for unprotected species on 9 million acres of State Trust Lands in 2019. City and county councils have passed resolutions condemning wildlife killing contests in Arizona, Minnesota, New Mexico and Wisconsin. The National Coalition to End Wildlife Killing Contests is working with local coalitions and citizens in states across the nation to ban the bloodsport.

“There has been a lot of social outcry against this, and you can kind of understand why. It's difficult to stand up and defend a practice like this. It's just not enough to say, 'Science will tell us it doesn't have a significant impact on the predator population.'”

~ Jim Zieler, Hunter and Chair of the Arizona Game & Fish Commission

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