

Prohibiting Wildlife Killing Contests HB2900 (Moeller)

HB2900 (Moeller) would make it unlawful for any person to organize, sponsor, conduct, promote, or participate in any contest, organized competition, tournament, or derby with the intent of taking or hunting fur-bearing mammals for cash, prizes or other inducements, otherwise known as wildlife killing contests.

These events are an irreverent degradation of Illinois' wildlife, which belong to all state residents. Wildlife killing contests target and kill coyotes, foxes, raccoons and other wildlife for prizes or entertainment. These events do not align with Illinois' hunting tradition of sportsmanship and fair chase principles. Instead, they incentivize maximizing the killing of fur-bearing mammals for a prize, which undermines the public's view of hunting. Killing contests are promoted across Illinois and are conducted with no oversight nor specific regulation by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. These contests take spurious advantage of minimal bag limits and liberal seasons, and are completely contrary to the principles of professional wildlife management. Coyotes, the most targeted species, can be hunted using dangerous weapons not allowed *for any other species*, "including large capacity semi-automatic rifles and shotguns with any type of shell" (huntillinois.org).

There is no credible science supporting the indiscriminate killing of wildlife as an effective method for management. Justifying these events as "predator control" is unsupported by scientific evidence. Predator populations self-regulate, preventing overpopulation. Claims of coyote overpopulation are subjective and unsubstantiated. Indiscriminate killing can boost coyote populations, exacerbate conflicts, and doesn't reliably increase prey numbers, which are more affected by habitat and climate, a view shared by professional wildlife and hunting organizations.^{1,2}

Mass removal of vital wildlife species from the environment impairs the ecological benefits these animals provide to both urban and rural communities. Bobcats, foxes, and coyotes control rodent and rabbit populations, which in turn helps keep cities clean, protects crops, and reduces the transmission of zoonotic diseases such as Lyme disease, which is continually on the rise in Illinois.³ More specifically, coyotes consume animal carcasses, remove sick animals from the gene pool, disperse seeds, indirectly boost plant and wildlife biodiversity, and protect ground-nesting birds. Wildlife killing contests impair these vital ecological services.¹

Opposition to wildlife killing contests is growing rapidly. Ten states have banned wildlife killing contests: Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont and Washington. In addition, local governments in Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin have condemned these events. In April of 2022, Congress introduced the Prohibit Wildlife Killing Contests Act, which would prohibit organizing, sponsoring, conducting, or participating in wildlife killing contests on more than 500 million acres of U.S. public lands.

This bill is not a ban on hunting and does not impact other laws, hunting regulations or contests. Individuals will still be allowed to hunt coyotes and other wildlife according to state laws. This bill does not prohibit contests, such as 'buck' or 'bass' contests, or those targeting species classified as 'invasive'.

Supporters include the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, Project Coyote and its Illinois membership, the Illinois Bobcat Foundation, and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).⁴

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¹ Project Coyote's Science Advisory Board has developed an extensive exposition of these arguments alongside the numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies supporting these claims, signed by over 70 conservation scientists. The document is publicly available at: https://www.projectcoyote.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SAB-Letter-Against-WKCs_FINAL_2021.01.13.pdf.

² See resolution by the Minnesota Izaak Walton League opposing killing contests (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xSPd6-aW1dxO7s2aYCNxpzQWeTtEVBj/view>), The Wildlife Society's issue statement on killing contests (https://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TWS_IS_WildlifeKillingContest_ApprovedMarch2019.pdf), and statements on predators and prey species by the National Wild Turkey Federation (<https://www.nwtf.org/content-hub/wild-turkeys-and-predators>) and Ducks Unlimited (<https://duckscdn.blob.core.windows.net/imagescontainer/landing-pages/conservation/conservation-facts/ducks-and-predators-lowres.pdf>). ³ *These things are everywhere: Experts, Lyme disease patients warn of tick season in Illinois. The Pantagraph. Jul 2, 2023* https://pantagraph.com/news/state-regional/these-things-are-everywhere-experts-lyme-disease-patients-warn-of-tick-season-in-illinois/article_687a60e2-16d8-11ee-8c28-6f4c0e9ff1f2.html#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20the%20Illinois%20Department,April%20and%20going%20through%20July. ⁴ The language and intent of the legislation is supported by signatories to a petition for rulemaking submitted to the Illinois DNR in December 2022 by HSUS. You can find both petitions to the IDNR at: <https://projectcoyote.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/PetitionIDNRforWKCRulemaking.pdf>.