

# PROJECT COYOTE

F O S T E R I N G   C O E X I S T E N C E



29 March 2024

**To:** Illinois House of Representatives

**Re:** *In support of HB2900*

Esteemed members of the Illinois House of Representatives,

On behalf of Project Coyote and our Illinois supporters, we submit the below information and scientific literature in support of HB2900 (Moeller). Project County has over 720 supporters and members in Illinois, a number that is growing. We are joined in this initiative to ban wildlife killing contests in Illinois, including support of HB 2900, by the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club (Illinois membership of 22,283). Sierra Club's local groups statewide have been particularly engaged in this effort.

HB2900 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 (WKC). In WKCs, participants compete to kill most commonly coyotes, but also foxes and raccoons for prizes and entertainment.

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 or non-existent bag limits and liberal (or year-round) seasons, and are completely contrary to the principles of professional wildlife management and broad public values, as explained below.

**These events are an irreverent degradation of Illinois' wildlife, which belong to all state residents.** These events do not align with Illinois' 'fair chase' hunting principles. Instead, they incentivize maximizing the killing of fur-bearing mammals for profit, a practice akin to market hunting which contributes to ecological degradation. Coyotes, the most targeted species, can be hunted by the hundreds in a single competition, using dangerous weapons not allowed for any other species,<sup>1</sup> "including large capacity semi-automatic rifles and shotguns with any type of

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<sup>1</sup> The Humane Society of the United States, "Just released: Gruesome undercover investigation at Illinois wildlife killing contest reveals more than 400 coyotes slaughtered for cash and bragging rights". March 15, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.humanesociety.org/news/just-released-gruesome-undercover-investigation-illinois-wildlife-killing-contest-reveals-more>.

shell” (huntillinois.org). These motivations and values are directly opposed to the values of care, respect for, and coexistence with animals and nature shared by the broad public and promoted by public agencies. A recent poll by Remington Research Group shows that over three-quarters of Illinoisans agree with the scientific literature in considering wild animals such as coyotes, foxes and bobcats to be important to Illinois ecosystems, and the IDNR has publicly supported such views and science.<sup>2</sup> The same poll shows that close to two-thirds of Illinoisans would support a ban on WKC’s if supplied with minimal information on their occurrence and impacts. The broad public is generally unaware of the existence of such contests, let alone their occurrence in their state or county.

**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 accumulated through dozens of studies conducted by state and federal agencies, top research institutions and independent scientists, published in some of the most prestigious scientific journals.<sup>3</sup> That evidence suggests widespread, indiscriminate killing:

- Does not resolve human-wildlife conflicts, such as predation on domestic animals, because it does not target the individual(s), site(s) or time(s) when the incident(s) occurred. Killing may even lead to increased risk of predation through disruptions of individual behavior and social dynamics.<sup>4</sup>
- Does not result in increased prey populations, which are frequently regulated by more limiting factors, such as lack of suitable habitat and climate.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Does not result in decreased coyote populations, given killing tends to catalyze an increased reproductive response that overcompensates for their killing through increased litters and pup survival.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Coyotes are valuable members of the wildlife community. They help keep populations of small mammals and rabbits under control. As Illinois’ largest remaining predator, they are an integral part of healthy ecosystem functioning”. See “Positive Benefits”, [www.wildlifeillinois.org/gallery/mammals/cat-like-or-dog-like/coyote/](http://www.wildlifeillinois.org/gallery/mammals/cat-like-or-dog-like/coyote/). “Raccoons are mesopredators and they help control local insect and rodent populations. They also are important seed dispersers.” See “Positive Benefits”,

[www.wildlifeillinois.org/gallery/mammals/common-backyard-wildlife/raccoon/](http://www.wildlifeillinois.org/gallery/mammals/common-backyard-wildlife/raccoon/).

<sup>3</sup> 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](https://www.projectcoyote.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SAB-Letter-Against-WKCs_FINAL_2021.01.13.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> “Target the responsible coyote(s) when a pattern of “undesirable” behavior develops. Usually it will be easier to change human and domestic animal use of an area than to capture the coyote(s). Recognize that coyote population reduction (removing some or all of the coyotes in an area) is usually unrealistic and always temporary.” Retrieved from <https://wildlifeillinois.org/identify-wildlife/coyote/>.

<sup>5</sup> See 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>).

<sup>6</sup> “While predators do eat some game birds and rabbits, this is not what is causing our long-term decline. If we had adequate habitat (quantity and quality), there would be more game on the landscape.” (Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, Illinois Digest of Hunting and Trapping Regulations: 2019-2020.

Moreover, predator populations self-regulate according to territory and prey availability, preventing overpopulation. Claims of coyote overpopulation are subjective and unsubstantiated. The scientific evidence is clear in that widespread 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.<sup>3,5,7</sup> Additionally, numerous state agencies, professionals, and hunters have recognized that killing contests are contrary to adequate wildlife management and undermine the reputation of hunters:

- **Tony Wasley, hunter, director of Nevada Department of Wildlife, and president of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies**, stated: “Killing contests are ethically upsetting by virtue for most members of society. Hunting should not be a competition as such behavior ultimately degrades the value of life and undermines respect for the animals being hunted.”<sup>8</sup>
- **The Arizona Game and Fish Commission** stated: “[t]o the extent these contests reflect on the overall hunting community, public outrage with these events has the potential to threaten hunting as a legitimate wildlife management function” and “Wildlife predator/fur-bearing hunting contest[s] that link economic gain to the greatest number or variety of animals killed are contrary to the important principle that the take of wildlife should not be allowed to go to waste or taken for economic gain.”<sup>9</sup>
- **Mike Finley, chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission** stated: “[k]illing large numbers of predators as part of an organized contest or competition is inconsistent with sound, science-based wildlife management and antithetical to the concepts of sportsmanship and fair chase.”<sup>10</sup> He also called the contests “slaughter fests” and “stomach-turning examples of wanton waste.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See resolution by the Minnesota Izaak Walton League opposing killing contests (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xSPd6-aW1dxO7s2aYCNxpzOWeTtEVBJI/view>) and The Wildlife Society’s issue statement on killing contests ([https://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TWS\\_IS\\_WildlifeKillingContest\\_ApprovedMarch2019.pdf](https://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TWS_IS_WildlifeKillingContest_ApprovedMarch2019.pdf)).

<sup>8</sup> Nevada Department of Wildlife November Wildlife Commission Meeting, Nov. 5, 2021. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELXWyYLR\\_f8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELXWyYLR_f8).

<sup>9</sup> Arizona Game and Fish Commission, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Title 12. Natural Resources Chapter 4. Available at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/azgfd-portal-wordpress/azgfd/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/25093742/R12-4-303-NP\\_RM.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/azgfd-portal-wordpress/azgfd/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/25093742/R12-4-303-NP_RM.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Testimony by Mike Finley to the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee, March 18, 2019. Available at: <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/200547>.

<sup>11</sup> Todd Wilkinson, *A Death of Ethics: is hunting destroying itself?*, Mountain Journal, Dec. 12, 2018. Available at: <https://mountainjournal.org/hunting-in-america-faces-an-ethical-reckoning>.

- **Ted Chu, former wildlife manager with Idaho Fish and Game** stated: “Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest animals.”<sup>12</sup>
- **Ray Powell, the former New Mexico Commissioner of State Lands**, has said: “The non-specific, indiscriminate killing methods used in this commercial and unrestricted coyote killing contest are not about hunting or sound land management. These contests are about personal profit, animal cruelty . . . . It is time to outlaw this highly destructive activity.”<sup>13</sup>
- **Dan Gibbs, hunter and executive director of Colorado Department of Natural Resources:** ‘For me, hunting contests don’t sit well. As a sportsman I’d never participate in one personally. Hunting is an important reverent tradition in Colorado and powerful management tool but I also think wildlife killing contests give sportsmen and sportswomen a bad name and damage our reputation.’<sup>14</sup>

**Mass removal of vital wildlife species from the environment impairs the ecological benefits these animals provide to both urban and rural communities.** There is complete scientific consensus that coyotes, foxes, raccoons and other targeted wildlife play important ecological roles.<sup>2,3</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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 through their suppression of smaller predators. Wildlife killing contests disrupt ecological processes and impair these vital ecological services, especially of Illinois’ largest predator (coyotes), which contribute greatly to human well-being.<sup>3,16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Todd Wilkinson, *Shoot biggest wolf, win trophy and cash*, Jackson Hole News & Guide, Dec. 18, 2013. Available at: [https://www.jhnewsandguide.com/opinion/columnists/the\\_new\\_west\\_todd\\_wilkinson/article\\_260cbc66-0bf6-544b-bcf2-b5e9220247bb.html](https://www.jhnewsandguide.com/opinion/columnists/the_new_west_todd_wilkinson/article_260cbc66-0bf6-544b-bcf2-b5e9220247bb.html).

<sup>13</sup> Ray Powell, Letter to Mark Chavez, owner of Gunhawk Firearms, Nov. 15, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting, Apr. 30, 2020. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vvk7x\\_gx5PY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vvk7x_gx5PY).

<sup>15</sup> ‘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](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).

<sup>16</sup> Leo, V., Reading, R. P., Gordon, C., & Letnic, M. (2018). Apex predator suppression is linked to restructuring of ecosystems via multiple ecological pathways. *Oikos*, 1–10; O’Bryan, C. J., Braczkowski, A. R., Beyer, H. L., Carter, N. H., Watson, J. E. M., & McDonald-Madden, E. (2018). The contribution of predators and scavengers to human well-being. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 2(2), 229–236.

**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’.

Given the above information, we urge your support of HB2900 (Moeller), which will prohibit this egregious practice, and in doing so undoubtedly foster biodiversity, ecosystem resilience, and coexistence integral to the wellbeing of people, animals and nature in The Prairie State.

Sincerely,



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