



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

April 17, 2019

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**To:** Wildlife Advisory Commission  
Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service  
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**Re:** Proposal for rule change to prohibit wildlife killing contests in Maryland

Chair Compton and Members of the Wildlife Advisory Commission,

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States, based in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and our many Maryland members and supporters, I would like to open up for review and discussion the issue of wildlife killing contests for furbearer species in the state of Maryland.

We have identified at least two such contests in our state in recent years. In the Southern Maryland Predator Hunt that was held on January 15-17, 2016 at Fred's Sports #2 in White Plains, contestants received 1 point for each red or gray fox killed, and 2 points for each coyote killed.<sup>1</sup>

The other, and far more egregious, contest is the Annual Maryland Predator Hunting Competition, which was most recently held on January 20, 2019 at the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA) chapter at 26430 Mullinix Mill Rd. in Mount Airy. According to a web forum post by the organizers of this event, participants killed and brought in 236 animals to be weighed in consideration for prizes. Most of these animals were red foxes, but also some gray foxes, coyotes, and raccoons. The winning team killed 44 red foxes, and several teams killed more than 20 red foxes.<sup>2</sup> At last year's event, more than 140 foxes and coyotes were killed; the first, second and third place teams collectively killed 66 foxes and 2 coyotes.<sup>3</sup>

These killing contests are out of step with our current understanding of the important role that wild carnivores play in our ecosystems, and are counter to sound, science-based wildlife management and the tradition of sportsmanship of the great state of Maryland. They are also antithetical to responsible hunting ethics that encourage respect for wildlife and their habitat and discourage the frivolous use of wildlife. I offer the following as points of discussion:

- 1. Wildlife killing contests contravene modern, science-based wildlife management principles, and could damage the reputation of Maryland sportsmen and sportswomen.**

State wildlife agencies hold and manage wildlife in the public's trust, and those that allow wildlife killing contests risk besmirching all hunting. 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>4</sup> Vermont's Fish & Wildlife Department has also noted, "Coyote hunting



contests are not only ineffective at controlling coyote populations, but these 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.”<sup>5</sup>

In early 2018, investigators with the Humane Society of the United States attended the weighing in and judging portions of two wildlife killing contests in New York and New Jersey, similar to the Annual Maryland Predator Hunting Competition. Video footage obtained from the contests showed participants slinging dead coyotes and foxes into piles to be weighed and judged, joking about the methods used to lure and kill the animals, and laughing and posing in front of a row of foxes strung up by their feet.<sup>6</sup> A recent HSUS investigation in Oregon yielded similarly gruesome results.<sup>7</sup> Such behaviors demonstrate a lack of respect for wildlife and serve to undermine the reputation of ethical hunting.

**2. The indiscriminate killing of wild carnivores will not reduce or mitigate conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock.**

Disrupting the coyote family structure by killing individual animals, including alpha animals, may actually increase human-coyote conflicts. Exploited coyote populations tend to have younger, less experienced coyotes, increased numbers of yearlings reproducing, and larger litters. For adult coyotes with dependent young, the need to feed pups provides significant motivation for coyotes to switch from killing small and medium-sized prey to killing sheep.<sup>8</sup>

Killing contests and open hunts do not target specific, problem-causing coyotes or foxes. They target those in woodlands and grasslands who are keeping to themselves, and not the ones who become habituated to human food sources such as unsecured garbage, pet food, or livestock carcasses (left by humans). Prevention—not lethal control—is the best method for minimizing conflicts with coyotes or foxes.<sup>9</sup> Eliminating access to easy food sources, such as bird seed and garbage, supervising dogs while outside, and keeping cats indoors reduces conflicts with pets and humans. Practicing good animal husbandry and using strategic nonlethal predator control methods to protect livestock (such as electric fences, guard animals, and removing dead livestock) are more effective than lethal control in addressing coyote-human conflicts.<sup>10</sup>

**3. Killing contests will not increase game populations.**

The best available science demonstrates that killing wild carnivores to increase ungulate populations is unlikely to produce positive results because the key to ungulate survival is protecting breeding females and access to adequate nutrition, not predation.<sup>11</sup> In fact, in a new study published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, researchers from North Carolina State University, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, and the University of Montana found no consistent decline in deer harvest numbers after coyote arrival in the eastern U.S. The researchers evaluated deer harvest numbers from 1980 to 2014 in 384 counties in North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Ohio, New Jersey, and New York, and found that coyotes are not limiting deer numbers in those states and that coyote removal



programs will do little to increase regional deer numbers. The study's lead author, Dr. Eugenia Bragina of the Wildlife Conservation Society, said, "Coyotes on the east coast of the United States have not been limiting deer, so eradicating coyotes is not an efficient way to increase deer numbers in the region."<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, in response to concerns from hunters that wild carnivores may be diminishing populations of small game animals, the Pennsylvania Game Commission issued the following statement in 2016:<sup>13</sup>

"During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Game Commission focused much of its energy and resources into predator control efforts. During this period, we did not understand the relationship between predators and prey. After decades of using predator control (such as paying bounties) with no effect, and the emergence of wildlife management as a science, the agency finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work. . . . To truly serve sportsmen, we must focus on proven means to restore small game hunting. And we do this by improving the habitat. . . . You can't manage wildlife based on what makes intuitive sense, or based on anecdotal information. . . .

Practices such as forestry and farming dictate the abundance of small game, not predators. To pretend that predator control can return small game hunting to the state is a false prophecy. . . . [Predators] don't compete with our hunters for game. The limiting factor is habitat – we must focus our efforts on habitat." (Emphasis added.)

In recommending against a year-round hunting season on coyotes, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation based their decision in part on the fact that "...random removal of coyotes resulting from a year-round hunting season will not: (a) control or reduce coyote populations; (b) reduce or eliminate predation on livestock; or (c) result in an increase in deer densities."<sup>14</sup>

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department similarly questioned the effectiveness of wildlife killing contests, stating that, "...we do not believe such short-term hunts will have any measurable impact on regulating coyote populations, nor will they bolster populations of deer or other game species."<sup>15</sup>

#### **4. Killing coyotes and foxes harms sensitive ecosystems.**

Coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems, providing a number of free, natural ecological services.<sup>16</sup> For example, coyotes help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, curtailing hantavirus, a rodent-borne illness that kills humans. In addition, coyotes clean up carrion (animal carcasses), increase biodiversity, remove sick animals from the gene pool, and disperse seeds. Coyotes balance their ecosystems and have trophic cascade effects such as indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores and



increasing the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.<sup>17</sup> Foxes are important for controlling tick-borne diseases, such as Lyme, by preying on mice and other rodents that harbor the disease carrying ticks.<sup>18</sup>

**5. Indiscriminately killing large numbers of coyotes and foxes is fundamentally inhumane.**

Offering prizes for the killing of large numbers of animals is deeply at odds with the humane values of Marylanders. The enthusiasm for the mass killing of animals is likely to be viewed as barbaric, sadistic, cruel, and wasteful by the majority of the people of Maryland, and could taint the image of the sporting community overall in our state.

**6. Conclusion**

Killing animals for prizes is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of coyotes and foxes and of natural ecosystems. As we learn more about coyotes, foxes, and other vital native carnivore species, and as the public's perception of the way animals should be treated continues to evolve, the general public will not tolerate activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable.

I ask that WAC members review these points, and to consider opening up a discussion about next steps. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Boyles Griffin

**References**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://forum.gofoxpro.com/fp\\_forums/showthread.php?t=12111](http://forum.gofoxpro.com/fp_forums/showthread.php?t=12111)

<sup>2</sup> [http://forum.gofoxpro.com/fp\\_forums/showthread.php?t=14516](http://forum.gofoxpro.com/fp_forums/showthread.php?t=14516)

<sup>3</sup> [http://forum.gofoxpro.com/fp\\_forums/showthread.php?t=13825](http://forum.gofoxpro.com/fp_forums/showthread.php?t=13825)

<sup>4</sup> Powell, Ray: Letter to Mark Chavez, owner of Gunhawk Firearms, November 15, 2012.



<sup>5</sup> “Eastern Coyote Issues – A Closer Look,” Vermont Fish & Wildlife, January 2017 at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Hunt/trapping/Eastern-Coyote-Position-Statement.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Kitty Block (May 3, 2018): “Undercover investigation exposes grisly cruelty at Oregon wildlife killing contest; lawmakers move to ban such events in the state.” *A Humane Nation* at <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2019/01/undercover-investigation-exposes-grisly-cruelty-at-oregon-wildlife-killing-contest-lawmakers-move-to-ban-such-events-in-the-state.html>

<sup>7</sup> Kitty Block (January 30, 2019): “Undercover video takes viewers into grisly world of wildlife killing contests.” *A Humane Nation* at <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2018/05/undercover-video-takes-viewers-into-grisly-world-of-wildlife-killing-contests.html>

<sup>8</sup> F. F. Knowlton, E. M. Gese, and M. M. Jaeger, “Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management,” *Journal of Range Management* 52, no. 5 (1999); B. R. Mitchell, M. M. Jaeger, and R. H. Barrett, “Coyote Depredation Management: Current Methods and Research Needs,” *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 32, no. 4 (2004).

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<sup>10</sup> Adrian Treves et al., “Forecasting Environmental Hazards and the Application of Risk Maps to Predator Attacks on Livestock,” *BioScience* 61, no. 6 (2011); Philip J. Baker et al., “Terrestrial Carnivores and Human Food Production: Impact and Management,” *Mammal Review* 38, (2008); A. Treves and K. U. Karanth, “Human-Carnivore Conflict and Perspectives on Carnivore Management Worldwide,” *Conservation Biology* 17, no. 6 (2003); J. A. Shivik, A. Treves, and P. Callahan, “Nonlethal Techniques for Managing Predation: Primary and Secondary Repellents,” *Conservation Biology* 17, no. 6 (2003); N. J. Lance et al., “Biological, Technical, and Social Aspects of Applying Electrified Fladry for Livestock Protection from Wolves (*Canis Lupus*),” *Wildlife Research* 37, no. 8 (2010); Andrea Morehouse and Mark Boyce, “From Venison to Beef: Seasonal Changes in Wolf Diet Composition in a Livestock Grazing Environment,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 9, no. 8 (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Bishop, C. J., G. C. White, D. J. Freddy, B. E. Watkins, and T. R. Stephenson. 2009. Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-28; Hurley, M. A., J. W. Unsworth, P. Zager, M. Hebblewhite, E. O. Garton, D. M. Montgomery, J. R. Skalski, and C. L. Maycock. 2011. Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho. *Wildlife Monographs*:1-33.; Forrester, T. D. and H. U. Wittmer. 2013. A review of the population dynamics of mule deer and black-tailed deer *Odocoileus hemionus* in North America. *Mammal Review* 43:292-308.; Monteith, K. L., V. C. Bleich, T. R. Stephenson, B. M. Pierce, M. M. Conner, J. G. Kie, and R. T. Bowyer. 2014. Life-history characteristics of mule deer: Effects of nutrition in a variable environment. *Wildlife Monographs* 186:1-62.

<sup>12</sup> Eugenia V. Bragina, Roland Kays, Allison Hody, Christopher E. Moorman, Christopher S. Deperno, L. Scott Mills. “Effects on white-tailed deer following eastern coyote colonization.” *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, March 20, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.21651>

<sup>13</sup> Frye, Bob. “Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations,” *Trib Live*, July 25, 2016.

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<sup>15</sup> “Eastern Coyote Issues – A Closer Look,” Vermont Fish & Wildlife.

<sup>16</sup> Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis. 2005. *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*. Animal Protection Institute, Sacramento, California.

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<sup>18</sup> Amy Harmon, "Lyme Disease's Worst Enemy? It Might Be Foxes." *The New York Times*, August 2, 2017 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/science/ticks-lyme-disease-foxes-martens.html>