



June 1, 2021

Dear Kalamazoo County Commissioners,

On behalf of our Michigan supporters, volunteers, and staff, the undersigned organizations and individuals express their enthusiastic support for a resolution by the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners to oppose wildlife killing contests. In these gruesome events, participants compete to kill the most, the largest, or even the smallest coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and other wildlife species within a specified time period for the chance to win cash or other prizes. Hundreds of animals may fall victim at a single event, which typically take place over one or two days. These contests are out of step with our current understanding of the important role wild carnivores play in our ecosystems, and are counter to sound, science-based wildlife management principles and the humane values of the great state of Michigan. Wildlife killing contests held in Michigan take place across the state. Events in recent years include:

**U.P.**

- Ontonagon Valley Sportsman’s Club Predator Roundup (Kenton)
- Dickinson County Predator Quest (Felch)
- Iron County Predator Hunt (Iron River)
- Youth Predator Hunt Weekend (Bruce Crossing)
- Snipe Lake Pub and Grill Predator Round Up (Iron River)
- Copper Country Predator Hunt (Lake Linden, Houghton County)
- Skip’s Predator Days (Beaver Grove, Marquette County)
- Mark Buskirk Benefit Coyote Hunt (Barryton, Mecosta County)
- Coyote Roundup (Millington, Tuscola County)
- 2019 Coyote Hunt (Falmouth, Missaukee County)
- Annual Prescott Predator Hunt (Ogemaw County)
- Great Lakes Region Predator Challenge (Kalamazoo)
- Dog Down Coyote Tournament (Dowagiac, Cass County)
- The Extreme Predator Hunt (Alpena)
- Michigan Predator Quest (Alpena)

**L.P.**

- Predator Ascension Outdoors K9 GrandPrix Predator Calling Championship (Galesburg, Kalamazoo County)
- 2020 Hunt for the Cash Predator Bash (Durand)
- Coyote Bounty Hunt (Brooklyn, Jackson County)
- Luzerne Area Predator Roundup (Oscoda County)
- 2nd Annual Fur Harvester’s Event (Falmouth, Missaukee County)

**Hunters and wildlife management agency professionals are condemning wildlife killing contests in part because they are damaging the reputation of sportsmen and sportswomen.**

The behavior of many participants in wildlife killing contests shows a lack of respect for wildlife that undermines the reputation of ethical hunting. Video footage from a recent investigation of a wildlife killing contest in Indiana showed participants lining up dead coyotes for counting and punching holes in their legs to hang them upside down on the scale to be weighed. Prizes were awarded for killing the most coyotes as well as the “big dog” and “small dog” (“dog” referring to coyotes). An Indiana killing contest participant told investigators that he uses an AR-15 rifle with night vision to kill the animals, adding, “I enjoy it.”<sup>1</sup> Other investigations have documented killing contest participants joking about how the animals were killed, and coyote carcasses tossed in and outside of dumpsters after the competition had concluded. Such callous and wasteful displays are antithetical to Michigan’s valued tradition of sportsmanship and responsible hunting ethics, which encourage respect for wildlife and their habitat and discourage their frivolous use.

State agencies and officials are recognizing the damage that wildlife killing contests can inflict on hunting’s reputation and are taking action:

- In 2017, **Vermont Fish and Wildlife** stated that killing contests “...could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.”<sup>2</sup> The following year the Vermont legislature enacted a ban on coyote killing contests.
- In 2019, the **Arizona Game and Fish Commission** banned killing contests for predator and furbearer species, explaining that, “To 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.”<sup>3</sup>
- Also in 2019, the **Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife** enacted a statewide ban on killing contests for predator and furbearer species, “...recognizing that public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting and undermine public support for hunting in general...”<sup>4</sup>
- In 2019, the **New Mexico legislature** passed a statewide killing contest ban as well, prior to which the state’s Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard had said, “These are not hunting contests. They are animal cruelty contests.”<sup>5</sup>
- In 2020, Dan Gibbs, a hunter and executive director of Colorado Department of Natural Resources, told the **Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission** in support of its ban on wildlife killing contests, “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>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kitty Block - Humane Society of the United States, “Undercover investigation lays bare extreme cruelty in Indiana and Texas wildlife killing contests. Foxes, bobcats, coyotes among animals blasted with assault rifles.” February 10, 2021 at <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2021/02/hsus-investigations-indiana-texas-wildlife-killing-contests.html> More investigation footage and additional information at [www.humanesociety.org/wildlifekillingcontests](http://www.humanesociety.org/wildlifekillingcontests).

<sup>2</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>3</sup> The Arizona Game and Fish Commission: “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Title 12. Natural Resources Chapter 4.” <https://s3.amazonaws.com/azgfd-portal-wordpress/azgfd/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/25093742/R12-4-303-NPRM.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, “Proposed Regulations to Ban Predator Contests and Prohibit Wanton Waste,” July 24, 2019 <https://www.mass.gov/news/masswildlife-proposes-regulations-to-ban-predator-contests-and-prohibit-wanton-waste>

<sup>5</sup> Press Release: “Garcia Richard Signs Executive Order Banning Killing Contests on State Trust Land,” January 10, 2019 <https://www.nmstatelands.org/2019/01/10/garcia-richard-signs-executive-order-banning-killing-contests-on-state-trust-land/>

<sup>6</sup> Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting, April 30, 2020 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vk7x\\_gx5PY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vk7x_gx5PY)

- A few months later, **Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Brad Smith** said in support of that regulatory body’s statewide ban on wildlife killing contests, “I am a hunter, I’ll clarify that, and I’ve never perceived hunting as a contest. I think these are not hunting contests, they’re killing contests.”<sup>7</sup>
- And in April of 2021, the **Maryland legislature** banned killing contests with a landslide bipartisan vote. With the addition of California in 2014, eight U.S. states have now banned wildlife killing contests.

### **Wildlife killing contests are not an effective wildlife management tool.**

The indiscriminate killing promoted by these contests is counterproductive to sound wildlife management. Scientific studies have shown that coyote populations that are depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly because of the sudden drop in competition for resources.<sup>8</sup> The indiscriminate killing of coyotes stimulates increases in their populations because it disrupts their social structure, thereby encouraging more breeding and migration, which ultimately results in more coyotes.<sup>9</sup> Left alone, coyotes regulate their own numbers based on the availability of food and habitat and territorial defense by resident family groups. Typically, only the dominant pair in a pack of coyotes reproduces, which behaviorally suppresses reproduction among subordinate members of the group. But when one or both members of the alpha pair are killed, other pairs will form and reproduce, lone coyotes will move in to find mates, coyotes will breed at younger ages, litters are larger, and pup survival has been documented to be higher. These factors work synergistically to increase coyote populations following exploitation events.<sup>10</sup>

### **Wildlife killing contests do not increase populations of game animals.**

The best available science indicates that indiscriminately killing native carnivores like coyotes is not an effective method for increasing game species abundance, including populations of ungulates like deer, small game animals, and game birds. The Pennsylvania Game Commission addressed this issue in 2016, saying:<sup>11</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 its recently-updated coyote management plan, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission also found that “...most coyote diet studies document low to no prevalence of wild turkey or other gamebirds in diets.”<sup>12</sup> A *Ducks Unlimited Magazine* article states, “Predator control cannot result in meaningful increases in duck

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting, August 1, 2020 <https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2020081003>

<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); Robert Crabtree and Jennifer Sheldon, Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone, in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience*, ed. T. Clark et al. (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1999); J. M. Goodrich and S. W. Buskirk, Control of Abundant Native Vertebrates for Conservation of Endangered Species, *Conservation Biology* 9, no. 6 (1995).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*; see also S.D. Gehrt. 2004. Chicago Coyotes part II. *Wildlife Control Technologies* 11(4):20-21, 38-9, 42.

<sup>10</sup> F.F. Knowlton. 1972. Preliminary interpretations of coyote population mechanics with some management implications. *J. Wildlife Management*. 36:369-382.

<sup>11</sup> B. Frye. (July 25, 2016). “Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations,” *Trib Live*, <http://triblive.com/sports/outdoors/10756490-74/game-predator-predators>.

<sup>12</sup> Coyote Management Plan. (Mar. 1, 2018). North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission: 16.

numbers or birds in the bag and threatens to undermine the broad coalition of public support on which modern waterfowl conservation depends.”<sup>13</sup> And the National Wild Turkey Federation adds, “Removing a random predator from the landscape has no impact whatsoever on widespread turkey populations...Without good nesting habitat, eggs and poults are simply more vulnerable. Turkeys evolved to cope with predators. As long as they have a place to hide their nests and raise their young, they’ll do just fine without predator control.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Wildlife killing contests do not prevent conflicts with livestock.**

Disrupting the family structure of coyotes may, in fact, increase conflicts.<sup>15</sup> For example, exploited coyote populations tend to have younger, less experienced coyotes who have not been taught appropriate hunting behaviors. These coyotes are more likely to prey on easy targets like livestock or pets. Additionally, exploited coyote packs are more likely to have increased numbers of yearlings reproducing and higher pup survival— and feeding pups is a significant motivation for coyotes to switch from killing their preferred, small and medium-sized prey like rodents, to seeking out livestock.<sup>16</sup> Killing contests do not target specific, problem-causing coyotes or foxes. Instead, they target these species in woodlands and grasslands where conflicts with humans, livestock, and pets are minimal. They don’t target the carnivore species who have become habituated by human-provided attractants such as unsecured garbage, pet food, or livestock carcasses.

Furthermore, common arguments regarding the impact of predator-livestock conflict are exaggerated. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) data, livestock losses to wild carnivores are minuscule. The predominant sources of mortality to livestock, by far, are non-predator causes including disease, illness, birthing problems, and weather.<sup>17</sup> Prevention—not lethal control—is the best method for minimizing conflicts with coyotes.<sup>18</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>19</sup>

### **Wildlife killing contests do not comport with Michigan’s humane values.**

Wildlife killing contests promote gratuitous violence and send the message that our native wildlife species are disposable and life is cheap. Youth are often encouraged to participate, receiving the lesson that hunting is about only the thrill of killing and winning prizes. Hunting equipment such as electronic game calling devices,

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<sup>13</sup> Chuck Petrie: “Prairies Under Siege: Ducks, Habitat Conservation & Predators,” in the November/December 2003 *Ducks Unlimited* magazine. <https://www.ducks.org/conservation/where-ducks-unlimited-works/prairie-pothole-region/prairies-under-siege-ducks-habitat-conservation-predators>.

<sup>14</sup> The National Wild Turkey Federation: “Coexist with Predators” <http://www.nwtf.org/conservation/article/coexist-predators>

<sup>15</sup> Draheim, M. “Why killing coyotes doesn’t make livestock safer.” *The Conversation*, May 29, 2017. <https://theconversation.com/why-killing-coyotes-doesnt-make-livestock-safer-75684>

<sup>16</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).

<sup>17</sup> For an in-depth discussion, see: Wendy Keefover, “Northern Rocky Mountain Wolves: A Public Policy Process Failure: How Two Special Interest Groups Hijacked Wolf Conservation in America,” *WildEarth Guardians* [www.wildearthguardians.org/site/DocServer/Wolf\\_Report\\_20120503.pdf](http://www.wildearthguardians.org/site/DocServer/Wolf_Report_20120503.pdf) 1, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>18</sup> Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst*.

<sup>19</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).



night vision and thermal imaging scopes, spotlights, and high-powered rifles—including AR-15s, at a recent Luzerne Area Predator Roundup in Michigan—are often awarded as raffle prizes in these contests, and sports-style betting and gambling add another unsavory dimension.

An untold number of animals are orphaned or injured during wildlife killing contests held in the spring, when killing adults inevitably leaves dependent young to die from thirst, starvation, predation or exposure. Quite simply, the majority of Michiganders, including many Kalamazoo County residents, are likely to view such enthusiasm for the mass killing of their native wildlife as barbaric, cruel, and wasteful.

For all of these reasons, the undersigned organizations and individuals reiterate their wholehearted support for the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners resolution in opposition to wasteful and unsporting wildlife killing contests, and thank Kalamazoo County for addressing this important humane issue.

Signed,

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