



Animal Welfare Institute

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 863

Animal Welfare Institute

February 26, 2020

The Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), a national nonprofit organization with thousands of members in Maryland, respectfully urges the House Environment and Transportation Committee to pass HB 863 to prohibit wildlife killing contests in Maryland. Wildlife killing contests are events in which participants slaughter animals for entertainment, prizes, cash, or other inducements. At least two such contests have been held in Maryland over the past year and a half, with coyotes targeted in Oakland and foxes targeted in Mount Airy.

Such contests are not consistent with the North American model of wildlife conservation, have no scientific value or justification, and are not needed for wildlife management purposes. They are unethical and degrade the value of wildlife, and are an antiquated relic that have no place in a civil society or in modern wildlife management.

Such indiscriminate killing is counterproductive to effective wildlife population management. There is no scientific evidence supporting common claims that wildlife killing contests permanently reduce abundance of targeted species, increase populations of deer or other game species, or prevent conflicts between wildlife, humans, and livestock. Studies have shown that populations depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly due to the sudden drop in competition for resources.¹ This often leads to increases in human-wildlife conflict due to the presence of younger animals that have not learned appropriate hunting behaviors and are more likely to prey on easy targets like pets or livestock. Without such brutal forms of population control, however, predator populations form stable “extended family” social structures that naturally limit populations through defense of territory and the suppression of breeding by subordinate female members of the family group. Targeting specific animals in large numbers alters the ecosystem and disrupts predator-prey dynamics, which can result in an overpopulation of some prey species, thus leading to problems for farmers and the larger community.

Killing contests also damage the reputation of sportsmen. Animals are often baited or lured toward the hunters with distress calls of wounded young. There is no concept of fair chase, and the carcasses of the animals are usually wasted, which contravenes fundamental hunting ethics. These contests promote gratuitous violence, and often incorporate betting and gambling. The

¹ 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).



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Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department has stated that killing contests “could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.”²

New Mexico, California, Vermont, Arizona, and Massachusetts have all banned wildlife killing contests. By following suit, the Maryland government would demonstrate its alignment with the growing national outrage against these events. Such contests are antithetical to the respectful, ethical, and pro-conservation message that we should all be advancing to ensure the long-term protection of our wildlife heritage in the United States and in Maryland.

The Animal Welfare Institute would be happy to accept questions on any information presented in this testimony, and we hope that the House Environment and Transportation Committee will pass HB 863.

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² 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>.