



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

---

1255 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, NW  
Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20037

---

P 202-452-1100  
F 202-778-6132

---

[humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org)

December 4, 2019

Rebecca Noecker  
St. Paul City Council  
15 Kellogg Blvd. W., Room 310  
St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Councilmember Noecker,

On behalf of our Minnesota supporters, volunteers, and staff, the Humane Society of the United States would like to express its enthusiastic support for a resolution by the St. Paul City Council to oppose wildlife killing contests. In these gruesome events, participants compete to kill the largest number of coyotes, foxes, and other wildlife species within a specified time period for the chance to win cash or other prizes. 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 Minnesota.

Several wildlife killing contests have been held in Minnesota in recent years. For example, the annual Buffalo Ridge Coyote Hunting Tournament in Marshall in January of 2019 offered more than \$1,500 in prizes for killing the most coyotes, the smallest coyote, and the largest coyote. Participants gathered at a bar after the event to weigh and count the animals, and to celebrate. At the annual West Metro Coyote Tournament in Watertown, participants competed to kill coyotes and foxes. Other recent contests include the Hough Fur's 1st Annual Coyote Tournament in Barnesville, the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Dog Days of Winter Coyote Hunt in Sacred Heart, the Minndak Coyote Tournament in Randolph, and the Predator Hunt in Madison, MN.

**Damaging to the reputation of Minnesota's 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 recent investigations by the Humane Society of the United States at the weighing in and judging portions of wildlife killing 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>1</sup> Such callous displays are antithetical to Minnesota'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 the Vermont Fish and Wildlife department 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. 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>3</sup> The legislature in the Land of Enchantment did just that in 2018. In 2019 the Arizona Game and Fish Commission said, “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>4</sup> A few months later, the Commission’s proposed ban on killing contests for predator and furbearer species was approved, and is now in effect statewide. Also in 2019, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife proposed a statewide ban on contests for the killing of 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>5</sup> A final vote on that proposed ban is expected in December of 2019.

#### **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>6</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>7</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>8</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>9</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



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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>10</sup> A Ducks Unlimited magazine article states, “Predator control cannot result in meaningful increases in duck numbers or birds in the bag and threatens to undermine the broad coalition of public support on which modern waterfowl conservation depends.”<sup>11</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>12</sup>

**Wildlife killing contests do not comport with Minnesota’s humane values**

Wildlife killing contests promote gratuitous violence, and send the message that killing is fun, animals are disposable, and life is cheap. Youth are often encouraged to participate, sending the dangerous message to children that hunting is only about the thrill of killing and winning prizes. Hunting equipment such as game calling devices, night vision scopes, spotlights, and high-powered rifles—including AR-15s—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, when killing adult coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and other species inevitably leaves dependent young to die from thirst, starvation, predation or exposure. Quite simply, the majority of Minnesotans, including many St. Paul 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 Humane Society of the United States reiterates its wholehearted support for the St. Paul City Council’s resolution in opposition to the wasteful and unsporting wildlife killing contests that are held in our state. We appreciate that our capital city is addressing this important humane issue.

Sincerely,

Christine Coughlin  
Minnesota State Director  
Humane Society of the United States

Steven Pope  
Minnesota State Council Member  
and St. Paul resident



---

<sup>1</sup> Kitty Block - Humane Society of the United States, "Undercover Video Takes Viewers into Grisly World of Wildlife Killing Contests," <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2018/05/undercover-video-takes-viewers-into-grisly-world-of-wildlife-killing-contests.html> (2018).

Kitty Block - Humane Society of the United States, "Undercover Investigation Exposes Grisly Cruelty at Oregon Wildlife Killing Contest; Lawmakers Move to Ban Such Events in the State," <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> (2019).

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

<sup>4</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>5</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>6</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>7</sup> *Id.*; see also S.D. Gehrt. 2004. Chicago Coyotes part II. *Wildlife Control Technologies* 11(4):20-21, 38-9, 42.

<sup>8</sup> F.F. Knowlton. 1972. Preliminary interpretations of coyote population mechanics with some management implications. *J. Wildlife Management*. 36:369-382.

<sup>9</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>10</sup> Coyote Management Plan. (Mar. 1, 2018). North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission: 16.

<sup>11</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>12</sup> The National Wild Turkey Federation: "Coexist with Predators" <http://www.nwtf.org/conservation/article/coexist-predators>