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House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Testimony: HB 2728, Ban Coyote Killing Contests

Chair Witt, Representatives Nosse, Representative Schouten, Representative Sollman,
Representative Wilde, Representative Breese Iverson, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Central Oregon LandWatch, and my husband, Mike Gerdes and me, we ask that you pass HB2728 to ban coyote killing contests. With permission of our Executive Director, Ben Gordon, and me as a board member of Central Oregon LandWatch, we support this bill since it comports with hunter ethics, science, and the biology of the species.

My husband and I are avid hunters of game species but this type of blood sport contest gives hunters a bad name to our general public that does not hunt. The tradition of hunting has been ethical, sportsmanlike conduct to pursue the taking of free-ranging wildlife that does not give the hunter an improper advantage over such animals. The bill does not stop allowing landowners or Wildlife Services to take animals where needed due to impacts to their livestock and allows hunters to continue to harvest coyotes.

The coyote has been the subject of much controversy as well as curiosity and is amazingly resilient in the face of change. Coyotes were noted first in this country on Lewis & Clark's Expedition (1804-06) and they are also integrally involved in many Native American cultures and traditions as an avatar and deity. For example, in many Northwestern cultures, Coyote, although viewed as a trickster, is also a respected benefactor of humans, responsible for such important deeds as bringing fire to the people, teaching them the arts of civilization, and even the creator of humanity or the world.

Coyotes have been under pressure by livestock ranchers and governments to eradicate them although it is nearly impossible to permanently reduce coyote populations. More than 100 years of coyote killing has failed to diminish them. Historically found in habitats of the Midwest and Western U.S. and occupying open grasslands, deserts, and sparse woodlands, the highly versatile coyote has expanded from historic ranges and moved into diverse and now highly altered habitats. Coyotes have extended their range from arctic to tropic and from remote hinterlands to the suburbs of big cities. As one author on coyotes has noted, coyotes have flourished despite "the most epic campaign that surpassed any other in terms of the range of killing techniques."



Recent research shows that coyotes have an adaptive, evolutionarily derived strategy for surviving under persecution. When social structures are stable, typically only the alpha pair in a pack will mate and subordinates help rear and socialize the new pups. When pack animals such as coyotes are killed, the social structure of their pack breaks down, and more female coyotes are likely to breed. If the alpha female dies, beta females breed. Pressured, they engage in an adaptation called “fission-fusion” where packs break up and pairs and individuals scatter and colonize new areas, so their numbers can increase.

Packs generally protect their territories, so humans killing coyotes and breaking up packs allows new animals to come in, increasing the population. In a disrupted pack, more coyotes breed at younger ages, and more pups will survive following a temporary increase in prey. In full colonization mode, scientists have found that coyotes can withstand as much as a 70% yearly kill rate; by the next season the population will be back to its original number. Another aspect of fission-fusion is that when populations are pressured, litter sizes increase. The average litter size is usually around six but under heavy hunting pressure, litter sizes will increase as high as 12 to 16 pups.

Coyotes can be beneficial to agriculture including ranching and farming. While coyotes can be affected by diseases such as distemper, hepatitis, and parvo virus, they also directly or indirectly help to keep rodent populations in check, control disease transmission (by limiting rodent populations), consume animal carcasses, remove sick animals from the gene pool, and increase biodiversity.

Resilient in the face of change, opportunistic, smart and strategic hunters, coyotes have been studied in diverse areas and habitats from Yellowstone National Park to the suburbs of Chicago and Atlanta. Apex predators, such as coyotes, can have profound effects on ecosystems by controlling prey density, regulating disease, and maintaining biodiversity. By learning to coexist with them, we can provide more holistic and ecologically sustainable outcomes.

Scientific studies are clear and have concluded that mass killing of coyotes, such as in killing contests, are completely ineffective in reducing predation on either livestock or game animals. By destroying the stable structure of packs, mass killings cause increased problems.

Thank you for accepting this testimony. We hope that you pass HB 2728 to stop coyote killing contests.

Respectfully,
Amy Stuart
Central Oregon LandWatch board member

