



Animal Welfare Institute

900 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003
awionline.org phone: (202) 337-2332 fax: (202) 446-2131

July 2, 2021

Re: Comments in Support of Proposed Rulemaking to Ban Wildlife Killing Contests

Dear Members of the Board of Wildlife Resources:

The Animal Welfare Institute, on behalf of our members in Virginia, submits these comments in support of the rule proposed by the Department of Wildlife Resources (“DWR”) to add a new regulation, 4VAC15-20-260, to restrict coyote and furbearer hunting contests. We respectfully request that you vote to adopt this proposed regulation.

The Animal Welfare Institute, established in 1951, is a nonprofit charitable organization dedicated to reducing animal suffering caused by people. It seeks better treatment of animals in the wild, in the laboratory, on the farm, at home, and in commerce. This is accomplished through public education, research, collaboration, media relations, outreach to agencies, litigation, engaging its members and supporters, and advocating for stronger laws both domestically and internationally.

Wildlife killing contests are organized events in which participants kill animals within a certain timeframe for entertainment, prizes, cash, or other inducements. Teams compete in judging categories that often focus on the number of animals killed, the weight or the sex of animals killed, the particular species killed, or the smallest or largest body or body part of the animal killed. Contests frequently involve betting and end with a check-in or weigh-in of the animals, followed by a party where contest prizes are awarded. Afterwards, the carcasses of the animals are usually dumped away from public view. Contests in Virginia predominantly target native carnivores, and these events can result in hundreds of animals being wiped off a landscape in a single weekend.

The proposed rule would prohibit organizing, sponsoring, promoting, conducting, participating in, or soliciting participation in a contest or organized competition in which participants are offered cash, prizes, or other inducement for capturing or killing coyotes or furbearing animals,¹ which in Virginia includes foxes, bobcats, and raccoons.²

Virginia should join other states in banning wildlife killing contests because these events: (1) are cruel and violate fundamental hunting principles taught in Virginia’s hunter education program as well as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which damages the reputation of Virginia’s sportsmen and sportswomen; (2) undermine modern, science-based wildlife management principles and are not an effective wildlife management tool; (3) do not

¹ 4 Va. Admin. Code § 15-20-260.

² Va. Code Ann. § 29.1-100.

increase populations of game animals; (4) do not prevent conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock—and may increase them; and (5) have been banned in an increasing number of states due to growing public concern.

1. Wildlife killing contests are cruel and contravene hunting principles taught in Virginia’s hunter education program as well as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Wildlife killing contests violate fundamental hunting principles, and the majority of Virginia residents are likely to view enthusiasm for the mass killing of animals as barbaric, cruel, and wasteful, which could gravely taint the image of sportsmen and sportswomen and of hunting in general. The very nature of these events—where participants are motivated by financial rewards to kill as many animals as allowed over a designated time period—increases the likelihood that participants will fail to abide by established hunting principles. Among other things, such codes generally promote the concept of “fair chase” and decry indiscriminate killing and waste.

The training manual that Virginia DWR uses in its hunter education program³ (hereinafter “the Manual”) contains the “Hunter’s Ethical Code,” which states: “Ethics generally cover behavior that has to do with issues of fairness, respect, and responsibility [E]thics preserve the hunter’s opportunity to hunt. Because ethics generally govern behavior that affects public opinion of hunters, ethical behavior ensures that hunters are welcome and hunting areas stay open.”⁴ The Manual sets forth the following principles,⁵ as are relevant here:

- Adhere to fair chase rules
- Ensure that meat and usable parts are not wasted
- Treat both game and non-game animals ethically
- Respect non-hunters by transporting animals discreetly, not displaying them

Regarding fair chase, the Manual states: “fair chase rules were developed to stem public criticism of hunters . . . the rules were later expanded, banning the use of vehicles, airplanes, and radios; electronic calling; or shooting in a fenced enclosure.”⁶ Contest participants frequently disregard this principle, with participants using bait and electronic calling devices to attract animals with sounds that mimic prey or distress calls of wounded young in an attempt to maximize the chances of winning cash and prizes.

Contest participants also violate the principle of “ensuring that meat and usable parts are not wasted.” In killing contests, the carcasses of the animals are wasted, as the animals are not consumed for meat, and the fur is rendered unusable due to the damaging effects of high-powered weaponry. After weigh-in, carcasses are typically dumped.

Disturbingly, investigative video footage has shown contest participants joking about the methods used to lure and kill the animals, and laughing and posing for photos in front of piles of

³ Today’s Hunter: a guide to hunting responsibly and safely, Kalkomey Enterprises, Inc. (2015).

⁴ *Id.* at 66.

⁵ *Id.* at 66-67.

⁶ *Id.* at 35.

dead animals,⁷ which represents a failure to “treat both game and non-game animals ethically.” Such behavior demonstrates a lack of respect for wildlife, promotes gratuitous violence, and sends the irresponsible and disturbing message that wanton killing is fun. Furthermore, an untold number of animals are orphaned or injured during these events. Killing adult bobcats, coyotes, foxes, and other species inevitably leaves dependent young to die from thirst, starvation, predation, or exposure, which is unethical.

Contest participants in Virginia also flaunt the outcome of their killing spree, in violation of the principle taught in Virginia’s hunter education program to “[r]espect non-hunters by transporting animals discreetly, not displaying them.” Investigative video footage taken during the Kanawha Valley Predator Calling Championship in Dugspur, Virginia, documented trucks and SUVs in Virginia outfitted with racks on the front and back bumpers holding the bodies of multiple dead animals. These dead animals were on full display and visible to anyone who passed the contest participants’ vehicles on the road. Bumper stickers and license plates read “Yote H8R,” “Coyote Taxi,” and “Coyote Hearse.” Furthermore, the weigh-in station was located in the open, across the street from a restaurant and just off a road where anyone in a passing vehicle would witness animals being tossed into piles of carcasses, participants dragging dead animals on the ground, and animals being hoisted up in the air to be weighed.

Lastly, the Manual teaches the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation,⁸ which contests violate. Tenet four of the Model states that “[w]ildlife shall be taken by legal and ethical means, in the spirit of ‘fair chase,’ and with good cause. Animals can be killed only for legitimate purposes—for food and fur, in self-defense, or for protection of property.”⁹ Killing animals in the hopes of winning cash and prizes, and for entertainment, is not one of the legitimate purposes set forth by the Model and taught to hunters in Virginia’s hunter education program.

Numerous state agencies and officials have recognized that killing contests undermine the reputation of sportsmen and sportswomen and damage the tradition of hunting:

- The 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”¹⁰ and “[t]enet four of the North American Model, ‘wildlife can be killed only for a legitimate purpose,’ is taught in mandatory hunter education courses throughout Vermont. We promote the utilization of, and respect for, coyotes and do not actively support coyote hunting contests that advocate coyotes as vermin. We consider coyotes a sustainable natural resource that can and should be managed as such.”¹¹

⁷ Humane Society of the United States, Undercover Video Takes Viewers into Grisly World of Wildlife Killing Contests, May 3, 2018. Available at” <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2018/05/undercover-video-takes-viewers-into-grisly-world-of-wildlife-killing-contests.html>.

⁸ Today’s Hunter: a guide to hunting responsibly and safely, Kalkomey Enterprises, Inc. at 82 (2015).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Vermont Fish & Wildlife, Eastern Coyote Issues – A Closer Look (Jan. 2017). Available at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Hunt/trapping/Eastern-Coyote-Position-Statement.pdf>.

¹¹ Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dep’t, Vermont Coyote Population Report 6 (2018). Available at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Hunt/trapping/Vermont%20Coyote%20Population%20Report%20to%20Legislature-2018.pdf>.

- The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has also found: “public controversy over this issue has the potential to threaten predator hunting and undermine public support for hunting in general[,]” which prompted a rulemaking to “address public concerns that certain hunting contests are unethical, contribute to the waste of animals, and incentivize indiscriminant killing of wildlife, which is inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.”¹²
- Mike Finley, chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission stated: “[k]illing large numbers of predators as part of an organized contest or competition is inconsistent with sound, science-based wildlife management and antithetical to the concepts of sportsmanship and fair chase.”¹³ He also called the contests “slaughter fests” and “stomach-turning examples of wanton waste.”¹⁴
- Ted Chu, former wildlife manager with Idaho Fish and Game stated: “Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest animals.”¹⁵
- Dan Gibbs, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, said: “For me, hunting contests don’t sit well. As a sportsman, I’d never participate in one personally . . . wildlife killing contests give sportsmen and sportswomen a bad name and damage our reputation.”¹⁶
- The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated: “[t]o 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” and “Wildlife predator/fur-bearing hunting contest[s] that link economic gain to the greatest number or variety of animals killed are contrary to the important principle that the take of wildlife should not be allowed to go to waste or taken for economic gain.”¹⁷
- 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

¹² Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Public Hearing Notice on Draft Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Regulations at 321 CMR 2.00 and 3.02. Available at: https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/09/20/DFW_DRAFT_321%20CMR%202.26%2C2.17%2C3.02%20-%20PHN%2C%20Summary%2C%20and%20Proposed%20Regulations.pdf.

¹³ Testimony by Mike Finley to the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee, March 18, 2019. Available at: <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/200547>.

¹⁴ Todd Wilkinson, *A Death of Ethics: is hunting destroying itself?*, Mountain Journal, Dec. 12, 2018. Available at: <https://mountainjournal.org/hunting-in-america-faces-an-ethical-reckoning>.

¹⁵ Todd Wilkinson, *Shoot biggest wolf, win trophy and cash*, Jackson Hole News & Guide, Dec. 18, 2013. Available at: https://www.jhnewsandguide.com/opinion/columnists/the_new_west_todd_wilkinson/article_260cbc66-0bf6-544b-bcf2-b5e9220247bb.html.

¹⁶ Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting, Apr. 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vk7x_gx5PY.

¹⁷ Arizona Game and Fish Commission, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Title 12. Natural Resources Chapter 4. Available at: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/azgfd-portal-wordpress/azgfd.wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/25093742/R12-4-303-NPRM.pdf>.

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.”¹⁸

- New Mexico State Senator Moores, who sponsored a bill to ban killing contests, stated: “Killing contests are just blood sports. All they are about is killing as many animals as you can, and not about protecting livestock or property celebrating mass killing is just not good wildlife management.”¹⁹

Virginia should not allow events that so clearly are at odds with the code of conduct established in its hunter education program and that tarnish the public’s image of Virginia’s sportsmen and sportswomen. The state should therefore move to defend the reputation of its hunting and outdoor recreation community by banning cruel and wasteful killing contests.

2. Wildlife killing contests undermine modern, science-based wildlife management principles and are not an effective wildlife management tool.

The indiscriminate killing promoted by wildlife killing contests is counterproductive to effective wildlife population management. Virginia’s hunter education manual cites to tenet six of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which states, “[w]ildlife management, use, and conservation shall be based on sound scientific knowledge and principles.”²⁰ Scientific studies have shown that many wildlife populations depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly due to the sudden drop in competition for resources and changes to social structure from the loss of individuals.²¹ This effect is well documented for coyote populations in particular, which are the species most commonly targeted by wildlife killing contest participants in Virginia. The indiscriminate killing of coyotes increases their populations over time because it disrupts their social structure, which encourages higher levels of breeding and migration.²² This negatively impacts the environment because coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems.²³ Coyotes help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, consume carrion, remove sick animals from the gene pool, disperse seeds, protect ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores, and increase the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.²⁴

¹⁸ Ray Powell, Letter to Mark Chavez, owner of Gunhawk Firearms, Nov. 15, 2012.

¹⁹ Center for Biological Diversity Press Release. Available at:

https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2019/new-mexico-coyote-killing-contest-04-02-2019.php.

²⁰ Today’s Hunter: a guide to hunting responsibly and safely, Kalkomey Enterprises, Inc. at 82 (2015).

²¹ F. F. Knowlton, et al., *Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management*, 52 *Journal of Range Management* 398, 400-402 (1999). Available at:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/43f7/3adf647447dd472db69c0b4712f1c71fab33.pdf>; Robert Crabtree and Jennifer Sheldon, Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone, in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience* (T. Clark et al., eds, 1999); J. M. Goodrich and S. W. Buskirk, *Control of Abundant Native Vertebrates for Conservation of Endangered Species*, 9 *Conservation Biology* (1995); Elizabeth Kierepka, et al., *Effect of Compensatory Immigration on the Genetic Structure of Coyotes*, 81 *J. Wildlife Mgmt* 1394, 1394 (2017). Available at: https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/2018/ja_2018_kilgo_002.pdf.

²² *Id.*; see also S.D. Gehrt, *Chicago Coyotes part II*, 11 *Wildlife Control Technologies* 20-21, 38-9, 42 (2004).

²³ Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis, Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore 9 (2005). Available at: http://www.projectcoyote.com/Coyotes_In_Our_Midst.pdf.

²⁴ S. E. Henke and F. C. Bryant, *Effects of Coyote Removal on the Faunal Community in Western Texas*, 63 *Journal of Wildlife Management* 1066 (1999); K. R. Crooks and M. E. Soule, *Mesopredator Release and Avifaunal Extinctions in a Fragmented System*, 400 *Nature* 563 (1999); E. T. Mezquida, et al., *Sage-Grouse and*

State wildlife management agencies across the country have recognized that killing contests do not control coyote population size. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation stated: “random removal of coyotes resulting from a year-round hunting season will not . . . control or reduce coyote populations.”²⁵ The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife stated: “hunting [would not] have an appreciable impact on coyote population size under any realistic scenarios.”²⁶ The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department made a similar finding, stating: “we do not believe such short-term hunts will have any measurable impact on regulating coyote populations” because “when coyote populations are exploited, productivity and pup survival increases.”²⁷ The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission concluded, after reviewing a large body of scientific and peer-reviewed literature, that indiscriminate, lethal methods of controlling coyotes, such as bounties and harvest incentive programs, are ineffective and counterproductive, that coyotes provide benefits to humans and ecosystems, and that non-lethal measures are the best way to address conflicts with coyotes.²⁸ The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission found: “[r]emoving coyotes for the purpose of eradication is an inefficient and ineffective method to control populations . . . hunting and trapping place pressure on coyote populations, and the species responds by reproducing at a younger age and producing more pups per litter.”²⁹ The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has stated: “[d]espite . . . past efforts to eliminate coyotes, the species maintains its numbers and is increasing in some areas.”³⁰ WDFW has also found that “it’s neither necessary nor possible to eliminate the entire population of coyotes in a given area.”³¹ Many other state wildlife management agencies, including those in Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming, have reached similar conclusions.³²

Indirect Interactions: Potential Implications of Coyote Control on Sage-Grouse Populations, 108 *Condor* 747 (2006). Available at: http://repository.uwyo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=zooology_facpub; N. M. Waser et al., *Coyotes, Deer, and Wildflowers: Diverse Evidence Points to a Trophic Cascade*, 101 *Naturwissenschaften* 427 (2014).

²⁵ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, *The Status and Impact of Eastern Coyotes in Northern New York* (1991). Available at: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/coystatny91.pdf.

²⁶ Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, Public Hearing Notice on Draft Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Regulations at 321 CMR 2.00 and 3.02. (Sept. 20, 2019). Available at https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/09/20/DFW_DRAFT_321%20CMR%202.26%2C2.17%2C3.02%20-%20PHN%2C%20Summary%2C%20and%20Proposed%20Regulations.pdf.

²⁷ Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dep’t, Vermont Coyote Population Report 9 (2018). Available at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Hunt/trapping/Vermont%20Coyote%20Population%20Report%20to%20Legislature-2018.pdf>.

²⁸ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Coyote Management Plan 11, 21-28 (2018). Available at: https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Species/Coyote%20Management%20Plan_FINAL_030118.pdf.

²⁹ Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, *Coyotes: Living with Coyotes*. Available at: <https://myfwc.com/conservation/you- conserve/wildlife/coyotes/>.

³⁰ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Coyotes. Available at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/canis-latrans#conflict>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, Coyote. Available at: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/wildlife/Pages/Coyote.aspx>; Kentucky Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Resources, Coyotes in the Suburbs. Available at: <https://fw.ky.gov/Wildlife/Documents/KASpring17coyotes.pdf>; Travis Dufour, *Living with Coyotes*, Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries Wildlife Division - Private Lands Program. Available at:

3. Wildlife killing contests do not increase populations of game animals.

The best available science indicates that indiscriminately killing native carnivores is not an effective method for increasing game species abundance. Rather, the most important management tool to increase game species is to decrease harvest of female ungulates,³³ followed by protection of habitat.³⁴ Many state commissions and agencies, including those in New York, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming, have concluded that reducing predator numbers will not enhance populations of ungulates, small game animals, and game birds.³⁵

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation found that “random removal of coyotes resulting from a year-round hunting season will not . . . result in an increase in

http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/publication/34726-living-coyotes-low-res/living_with_coyotes_low-res.pdf; Bill White, *The Bounty Hunter*, Missouri Dept. of Conservation (Aug. 21, 2012). Available at: <https://mdc.mo.gov/blogs/more-quail/bounty-hunter>; New Hampshire Fish and Game, Eastern Coyote. Available at: <https://wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/profiles/coyote.html>; Nevada Dept. of Wildlife, Coyote. Available at: <http://www.ndow.org/Species/Furbearer/Coyote/>; National Wildlife Control Training Program, Coyotes. Available at: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/publications/nuisance/coyotes.pdf>; Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Controlling Coyotes in Tennessee (Jan. 2003). Available at: <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/twra/documents/coyotecontrol.pdf>; Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Living with Wildlife. Available at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/coyotes.html>; West Virginia Dept. of Natural Resources, Eastern Coyote Impacts Of The Eastern Coyote On Wildlife Populations. Available at: <http://www.wvdnr.gov/hunting/CoyoteResearch.shtm>; Dave Rippe, *Predator Control and Wildlife*, Wyoming Game and Fish Dept., Habitat Extension Bulletin: No. 57 (July 1995). Available at: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/WGFD/media/content/PDF/Habitat/Extension%20Bulletins/B57-Predator-Control-and-Wildlife.pdf>.

³³ C.A. DeYoung, *Population dynamics, in Biology and Management of Whitetailed Deer* 147 (D. G. Hewitt, ed. 2011); J.C. Kilgo, et al, *Coyote removal, understory cover, and survival of white-tailed deer neonates*, 78 J. Wildlife Mgmt. 1261 (2014); North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, *Evaluation of Deer Hunting Seasons and Structures and Deer Management Units in North Carolina* (2015). Available at: <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Regs/Documents/Evaluation-of-Deer-Hunting-Seasons-and-Mgt-Units.pdf>.

³⁴ C.J. Bishop, et al., *Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change*, 172 Wildlife Monographs 1 (2009). Available at: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=27710&inline=true>; Hurley, M. A., et al., *Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho*, 178 Wildlife Monographs 1 (2011).; T.D. Forrester and H. U. Wittmer, *A review of the population dynamics of mule deer and black-tailed deer *Odocoileus hemionus* in North America*, 43 Mammal Review 292 (2013); K.L. Monteith, et al., *Life-history characteristics of mule deer: Effects of nutrition in a variable environment*, 186 Wildlife Monographs 1 (2014).

³⁵ See, e.g., Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, *Illinois Digest of Hunting and Trapping Regulations: 2018-2019*. Available at: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/hunting/documents/huntrapidigest.pdf>; Travis Dufour, *Living with Coyotes*, Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries Wildlife. Available at: http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/publication/34726-living-coyotes-low-res/living_with_coyotes_low-res.pdf; Missouri Dept. of Conservation, *Coyote*. Available at: <https://nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/coyote>; West Virginia Dept. of Natural Resources, *Eastern Coyote Impacts Of The Eastern Coyote On Wildlife Populations*. Available at: <http://www.wvdnr.gov/hunting/CoyoteResearch.shtm>; Dave Rippe, *Predator Control and Wildlife*, Wyoming Game and Fish Dept., *Habitat Extension Bulletin: No. 57* (July 1995). Available at: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/WGFD/media/content/PDF/Habitat/Extension%20Bulletins/B57-Predator-Control-and-Wildlife.pdf>.

deer densities.”³⁶ The Pennsylvania Game Commission found: “[T]he agency finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work 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.”³⁷ The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, in addressing wildlife killing contests, similarly stated: “we do not believe such short-term hunts will . . . bolster populations of deer or other game species.”³⁸

In a 2014 deer harvest report, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources concluded that trying to control coyotes to manage deer predation was ineffective.³⁹ North Carolina researchers evaluated deer harvest numbers in South Carolina, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida, New Jersey, and New York and found that coyotes are not limiting deer numbers in those states, and that coyote removal programs do little to increase regional deer numbers.⁴⁰ The West Virginia Department of Natural Resources has found: “[p]redator control of coyotes because of wildlife predation is unwarranted and unnecessary.”⁴¹ Regarding game birds, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission found that coyotes actually benefit game bird species because they suppress populations of smaller predators and because “most coyote diet studies document low to no prevalence of wild turkey or other gamebirds in diets.”⁴²

Notably, Virginia DWR’s 2020-21 fall wild turkey harvest summary stated that “Virginia’s turkey population is close to record levels for modern times,” and that fluctuations in population numbers are influenced by “the length and timing of the fall season, annual variation in reproductive success, acorn abundance, hunting pressure, and weather.”⁴³ Importantly, predation by coyotes and other carnivores is not mentioned as a factor affecting the population. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that this common rationale for holding killing contests that target predators is scientifically unfounded.

³⁶ New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation, *The Status and Impact of Eastern Coyotes in Northern New York* (June 1991). Available at: <http://www.nysenvirothon.org/Referencesandother/coyotes.pdf>.

³⁷ Jeff Mulhollem, *Pennsylvania Game Commissioners Reply to Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania on Predator Questions*, *Outdoor News* (July 22, 2016). Available at: <https://www.outdoornews.com/2016/07/22/pennsylvania-game-commissioners-reply-to-unified-sportsmen-of-pennsylvania-on-predators-questions/>.

³⁸ Vermont Fish & Wildlife, *Eastern Coyote Issues – A Closer Look* (Jan. 2017). Available at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Hunt/trapping/Eastern-Coyote-Position-Statement.pdf>.

³⁹ Charles Ruth, 2014 South Carolina Deer Harvest Report, South Carolina Dept. of Natural Resources. Available at: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/deer/2014DeerHarvest.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Eugenia V. Bragina et al., *Effects on white-tailed deer following eastern coyote colonization*, 83 *J. of Wildlife Mgmt.* 916 (2019).

⁴¹ West Virginia Dept. of Natural Resources, *Impacts of the Eastern Coyote on Wildlife Populations*. Available at: <http://wvdnr.gov/hunting/CoyoteResearch.shtm>.

⁴² North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, *Coyote Management Plan 16* (2018).

⁴³ Virginia Dept. of Wildlife Resources, *Virginia 2020-21 Fall Wild Turkey Harvest Summary* (2021). Available at: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/turkey/fallharvestsummary/>.

4. **Wildlife killing contests do not prevent conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock—and may increase them.**

Although some argue that contests are needed to reduce depredation of livestock, such contests are not effective in removing individual, problem-causing animals.⁴⁴ Most killing contests target predators in woodlands and grasslands where conflicts with humans, livestock, and pets are minimal. Studies have found that killing predators fragments social groups, which can increase the likelihood of livestock depredation.⁴⁵ In a signed statement, more than 70 conservation scientists made the following finding about the effect of indiscriminately killing predators on livestock depredation:

Some advocates of wildlife killing contests (WKC) believe they are necessary or beneficial for effective management of livestock depredation. We indicated that WKC are unlikely to have this effect. The reason why is that most individual predators do not participate in livestock depredations. Consequently, effective management of depredation requires (1) targeting the offending individual(s), and (2) intervening close to the site where the depredations occurred as well as responding in a timely manner. WKC do not represent the kind of targeted effort required for effective management of livestock depredations. Moreover, indiscriminate killing of predators is likely to exacerbate risks to livestock. The reason is that killing social carnivores like coyotes (and wolves) can lead to the disruption of predators' social and foraging ecology in ways that increase the number of transient individuals. These transient individuals that have not been acculturated (aversively conditioned) to living in areas with livestock may be more likely to kill livestock.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Adrian Treves et al., *Predator Control Should Not Be a Shot In the Dark*, 14 *Front Ecol Environ* 380, 381 (2016). Available at: http://faculty.nelson.wisc.edu/treves/pubs/Treves_Krofel_McManus.pdf.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Statement in Opposition to Wildlife Killing Contests: Signed By More Than 70 Conservation Scientists. Project Coyote (May 23, 2019). Available at <http://www.projectcoyote.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SAB-Letter-Against-WKCs-2019.05.23-FINAL.pdf>. See also F.F. Knowlton, et al., *Coyote depredation control: An interface between biology and management*, 52 *J. Range Mgmt.* 398 (1999); J.D.C. Linnell et al., *Large carnivores that kill livestock: do problem individuals really exist?*, 27 *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 698 (1999); P. Stahl and J.M. Vandel, *Factors influencing lynx depredation on sheep in France: Problem individuals and habitat*, 4 *Carnivore Damage Prevention News* 6 (2001); K.M. Blejwas et al., *The effectiveness of selective removal of breeding coyotes in reducing sheep predation*, 66 *J. Wildlife Mgmt.* 451 (2002); A. Treves et al., *Wolf depredation on domestic animals: control and compensation in Wisconsin, 1976-2000*, 30 *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 231 (2002); A. Treves and L. Naughton-Treves, *Evaluating lethal control in the management of human-wildlife conflict*, in *People and Wildlife, Conflict or Coexistence* 86 (R. Woodroffe et al., eds., 2005); E. Bangs and J.A. Shivik, *Managing wolf conflict with livestock in the northwestern United States*, USDA National Wildlife Research Center-Staff Publications 550 (2001); A. Treves et al., *American black bear nuisance complaints and hunter take*, 21 *Ursus* 30 (2010); K.A. Peebles et al., *Effects of remedial sport hunting on cougar complaints and livestock depredations*, 8 *PLoS ONE* e79713 (2013). Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0079713>; R.B. Wielgus and K. A. Peebles, *Effects of Wolf Mortality on Livestock Depredations*, 9 *PLoS ONE* e113505 (2014).

Additionally, exploited coyote packs are more likely to have increased numbers of pups, and feeding young has been found to be a significant motivation for coyotes to switch from killing small and medium-sized prey to killing sheep.⁴⁷

Furthermore, common arguments about impacts of predator-livestock conflict are exaggerated. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”), only 0.39 percent of cattle and sheep were lost to all carnivores combined (including coyotes, unknown predators, and dogs).⁴⁸ The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission has noted that, based on USDA data, dogs are an equal or greater risk to sheep, goats, and cattle as compared to coyotes.⁴⁹ Disease, illness, birthing problems, and weather constitute the overwhelming cause of livestock mortality.⁵⁰

5. Eight states have banned wildlife killing contests.

Eight states have enacted bans on wildlife killing contests targeting certain species. These states include Maryland, Massachusetts, Vermont, Colorado, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. In 2014, the California Fish and Game Commission banned contests targeting game species, furbearers, and nongame mammals. In 2018, the Vermont General Assembly banned coyote-killing contests. In 2019, the New Mexico General Legislature banned coyote-killing contests, the Arizona Fish and Game Commission banned contests for predator and furbearing species, and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife banned contests for predator and furbearer species. In 2020, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission banned contests for furbearing species and certain small game species and the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission banned contests for unclassified and classified wildlife species without a bag limit. In 2021, the Maryland legislature passed HB293/SB200, which banned contests to kill coyotes, foxes, or raccoons, with overwhelming bipartisan support. The bill became effective on May 30, 2021. Several additional states, including New Jersey, Oregon, and New York, either have legislation pending, or have had legislation introduced recently, that would ban wildlife killing contests. Virginia should align itself with this positive trend in science-based wildlife management.

Conclusion

Wildlife killing contests have no place in a civil society or in modern wildlife management. Such contests are antithetical to the respectful, ethical, and pro-conservation

⁴⁷ F. F. Knowlton, et al., *Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management*, 52 J. of Range Mgmt. 398, 403 (1999). Available at:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/43f7/3adf647447dd472db69c0b4712f1c71fab33.pdf>; B. R. Mitchell et al., *Coyote Depredation Management: Current Methods and Research Needs*, 32 Wildlife Society Bulletin 1209 (2004).

⁴⁸ See U.S. Dept. Agriculture, *Cattle and Calves Death Loss in the United States Due to Predator and Nonpredator Causes*, 2015 (2015). Available at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/nahms/general/downloads/cattle_calves_deathloss_2015.pdf; U.S. Dept. Agriculture, *Sheep and Lamb Predator and Nonpredator Death Loss in the United States*, 2015 (2015). Available at:

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/nahms/sheep/downloads/sheepdeath/SheepDeathLoss2015.pdf

⁴⁹ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, *Coyote Management Plan 10* (2018).

⁵⁰ *Id.*

message necessary to ensure the long-term protection of Virginia's wildlife heritage. If you have any questions or if there is any additional information we can provide, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Johanna Hamburger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Johanna Hamburger

Director and Senior Staff Attorney
Terrestrial Wildlife Program
Animal Welfare Institute
900 Pennsylvania Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20003
Phone: 202-446-2136
Email: johanna@awionline.org