

Wildlife Killing Contests

A Guide to Ending the Blood Sport
in Your Community



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



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How to use this guide

While blood sports such as dogfighting and cockfighting are recognized as serious crimes across the nation, a little-known activity—the wildlife killing contest—is still legal in almost every state.

The public has become increasingly aware of the plight of animals killed and injured in wildlife killing contests. A growing number of citizens are calling on their communities and states to pass laws banning this cruel blood sport. This guide will help YOU make a difference!

There are three main ways to target wildlife killing contests in your community and state:

1. Raising public awareness
2. Shutting down individual wildlife killing contests
3. Passing laws to ban wildlife killing contests

Please use this guide to get started:

- **Learn the issue:** To help familiarize you with the issue, this guide provides an overview of killing contests and what's being done to stop them.
- **Gather information:** This guide provides a list of questions to ask yourself regarding wildlife killing contests in your community and includes advice on reaching out to The HSUS for help, building a coalition and finding out about the opposition.
- **Take action:** This section of the guide provides an overview of the three main methods for combatting wildlife killing contests—raising public awareness, shutting down individual contest, and passing laws that ban wildlife killing contests.
- **Sample documents:** Please use the sample documents we've provided and adapt them to the issues in your community. We've included sample letters to the editor, op-eds, letters to sponsors and hosts, tweets, Facebook posts, a share graphic, factsheets, testimony and letters to lawmakers. Because coyotes are the most common victims in wildlife killing contests, we've included sample documents for coyote killing contests as well as general wildlife killing contests that you can adapt for whatever species is the target of events near you.
- **Useful documents:** At the end of this guide, you will find two factsheets: one about wildlife killing contests and one about coyotes. Share them on social media or with lawmakers, event sponsors, media outlets and others.

“Awarding prizes for wildlife killing contests is both unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of natural systems. Such contests are an anachronism and have no place in modern wildlife management.”

*Michael Sutton, former president,
California Fish and Game
Commission*

For assistance, contact wildlife@humansociety.org.

Learn the issue

What are wildlife killing contests?

Wildlife killing contests are organized events in which participants compete for prizes—typically cash or guns—to see who can kill the most or the largest animals within a certain time period.

Most Americans are shocked to learn that thousands of animals—including coyotes, foxes, bobcats, prairie dogs, rabbit, and squirrels—are killed in these events every year across the United States.

Participants typically pay a fee to enter the contests, which are usually held over a weekend. They attend a check-in event to start the contest followed by one or two days of hunting and/or trapping. The event ends with a celebration at a local hangout—often a bar or restaurant—where the animals' bodies are counted and weighed and prizes are awarded. Sponsors—usually local gun shops or hunting outfitter companies—frequently donate guns or hunting gear as raffle prizes.

The facts

Here are the basics about the cruel and violent contests being held in most states across the U.S.:

A blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting

Unlike dogfighting and cockfighting, which have been condemned as barbaric and outlawed in every state, wildlife killing contests persist and may even be growing in popularity. These competitive killing events are simply a bloodbath for entertainment purposes, with participants glorifying kill numbers over respect for the animal and its habitat. Participants often dump the bodies, having no need for them after the prizes are awarded.

A widespread problem

Wildlife killing contests take place annually in almost every state. Many of the events are high-stakes, with contestants coming from all over the U.S. to compete. A single hunt may draw more than 600 participants.

The following are just a few examples:

- **West Texas Big Bobcat Contest:** At its March 2017 event, 613 teams competed and killed 58 bobcats, in addition to coyotes and grey foxes, and received \$122,600 in prize money.
- **Southern Illinois Predator Challenge:** At the 2016 event, 25 teams paid \$50 each to compete and killed 114 coyotes for cash and prizes.
- **10th Annual Coyote Hunt – New York State and Pennsylvania:** In its 2017 event, more than 600 participants trapped and shot 85 coyotes in competition for a \$2,000 grand prize.
- **Wyoming Best of the Best State Championship:** Individuals and teams compete for the prize of killing the most coyotes, while non-hunting participants place bets on the activities.

Low-profile subculture

Wildlife killing contests, like dogfighting, are the province of a small subculture that is rarely glimpsed by the general public. The public's—and most hunters'—ire toward killing contests has led many organizers to keep their events low-profile to avoid negative publicity. Many of the contests are advertised by word-of-mouth within the ranks of hunters, or in private Facebook groups. Nevertheless, organizers have made efforts to expand their reach, now advertising to minors to participate.



Scales used to weigh coyotes killed in a 2017 Illinois wildlife killing contest

Persecuted species

Misunderstood species, deemed by some to be “pests” or “varmints,” are the animals most frequently killed during these events because there are almost no laws protecting them. They often can be killed in unlimited numbers, all year long, and using almost any method. It is impossible to know how many animals are injured or die in these contests every year. Organizers generally do not need to obtain a permit from the state wildlife agency and participants in general aren't required to report their kills.

Cruel and unsporting

Wildlife killing contests remove any notion of fair chase, the fundamental hunting ethic that dictates that the hunter should not gain an unfair advantage over the hunted. Most contest rules do not even mention hunting ethics. Participants often use high-tech equipment and may spend months preparing. While some general hunting rules apply—for example, laws that make it unlawful to shoot from a roadway—the prospect of prize money creates a powerful incentive to ignore them. Some contests even allow the use of cruel traps, while others permit hound hunting.

One of the most chilling aspects of killing contests is the use of electronic calling devices to attract coyotes into rifle range with sounds that imitate the cry of a coyote in distress. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear this cry for help, they come to investigate. **Manipulating animals' natural compassion to lure them into gun range is not hunting—it is a reprehensible practice condemned by most hunters and non-hunters alike.**

Dependent young may also be orphaned during these events and left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. In fact, some contests—including the government-run Georgia Coyote Challenge—are scheduled to occur during pup-rearing season with the stated purpose of ensuring that fewer coyote pups survive.

Baseless myths to justify the bloodshed

Wildlife killing contest participants piously claim to be helping society by ridding the environment of “varmints.” But there is a general misunderstanding and fear of some species—especially coyotes, the most common victim of killing contests.

The plight of the coyote

Historically stigmatized and ceaselessly persecuted, coyotes are one of the most misunderstood creatures in North America. Claims that coyotes attack children and pets, threaten livestock and diminish populations of game animals that “belong” to hunters are greatly exaggerated, and are out of step with modern scientific understanding of the importance of coyotes and other native carnivores.

Counterproductive to sound wildlife management

All species—especially native carnivores—play a vital role in healthy ecosystems. Coyotes, for example, provide a number of free, natural ecological services: helping to control disease transmission, cleaning up carrion (animal carcasses), keeping rodent populations in check, increasing biodiversity, removing sick animals from the gene pool and protecting crops.

Indiscriminate killing of native carnivores like coyotes may reduce their populations temporarily, but the best available science demonstrates that these species will respond with an increase in numbers. Wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. In the case of coyotes, this disruption allows more coyotes to produce and can increase conflicts with humans, livestock and pets.

Out of step with modern society

Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is antithetical to the way most Americans believe animals should be treated. Wildlife killing contests are no different than dogfighting or cockfighting, which have been condemned as barbaric and outlawed in all 50 states. Animals killed during these contests are persecuted because they are deemed to be “pests” or “varmints.” But a recent study by researchers at Ohio State University found that Americans’ attitudes toward historically stigmatized species such as coyotes is substantially more positive today than it was in 1978. Between 1978 and 2014, positive attitudes toward coyotes grew by 47 percent, with the majority of respondents expressing positive attitudes toward this species.¹



A public safety risk

Wildlife killing contests glorify violence and send a message to our youth that killing is fun and that life has little value. Many contest organizers, hoping to expand their base, have even created youth categories, encouraging children as young as 10 to participate. But there is a well-documented link between animal cruelty and other violent criminal behaviors. In fact, the FBI tracks crimes against

¹ George, K.A., Slagle, K.M., Wilson, R.S., Moeller, S.J., and Bruskotter, J.T.: “Changes in attitudes toward animals in the United States from 1978 to 2014,” *Biological Conservation* 201 (2016) 237-242.

Learn the issue

animals alongside felony crimes like arson and murder because it is a strong early predictor of human violence. Protecting animals from glorified violence protects communities.



What do leading wildlife managers say?

Experts agree that wildlife killing contests are cruel, unsporting and counterproductive to sound wildlife management. Below are a few comments from experts about wildlife killing contests.

“I’ve been concerned about these killing contests for some time. They seem inconsistent both with ethical standards of hunting and our current understanding of the important role predators play in ecosystems.”

“Awarding prizes for wildlife killing contests is both unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of natural systems. Such contests are an anachronism and have no place in modern wildlife management.”

Michael Sutton, former president, California Fish and Game Commission

“[T]he wildlife management profession does not generally recognize the use of contests as a tool with substantial wildlife management effect.”

State of Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners, August 2016

“Killing contests are not a proper way of introducing youth to the outdoors. I know, for I am an Eagle Scout. There was no killing involved in developing in me my love of nature.”

Richard Rogers, former commissioner, California Fish and Game Commission

“[Boone and Crockett Club] does not support programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.”

Boone and Crockett Club

“A society that condones unlimited killing of any species for fun and prizes is morally bankrupt.”

David R. Parsons, MS in Wildlife Ecology from Oregon State University, retired from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

“After decades of using predator control (such as paying bounties) with no effect, and the emergence of wildlife management as a science, the [Pennsylvania Game Commission] finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work. ... Predators—whether they be hawks, owls, eagles, bears or foxes—are an important part of Penns Woods. The species don’t compete with our hunters for game.”

Pennsylvania Game Commission, 2016 statement

“Shooting contests conducted in the name of killing animals for fun, money and prizes is just not consistent with the values of most people in the modern world.”

Larry Shoen, farmer, commissioner on the Board of County Commissioners, Blaine County, Idaho

What do leading wildlife managers say?

“I have hunted all of my adult life. Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest animals. The supporters of these sorts of activities would no doubt claim to be great defenders of hunting, yet they go out of their way to publicly present the worst possible image of hunting. If we hunters don’t clean up our own act, someone else will do it for us and we won’t like the results, but when that time comes, and it surely will, these “hunters” will have only themselves to blame.”

Ted Chu, supervisor, Idaho Fish and Game

“As ranchers who know that livestock and wildlife can coexist, we feel it’s important to do what we can to help end this unnecessary war on wildlife. ... It angers us when these contests are promoted as a way to help ranchers protect their livestock. The reality is, there is no noble purpose behind a killing contest.”

Keli Hendricks, rancher, member of Project Coyote Advisory Board

“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.”

Ray Powell, New Mexico Commissioner of State Lands



What do leading scientists say?

More than 50 scientists across North America have called for a prohibition on wildlife killing contests. They made the following statements in a signed letter dated January 2015:²

“The most general reason to prohibit WKC [wildlife killing contests] is that hunters and wildlife managers believe, as a community, that killing animals without an adequate reason is unjustified and unsportsmanlike. Killing an animal for a prize or trophy constitutes killing without an adequate reason.”

“Some advocates of WKC argue that they are important for achieving management objectives for other species, especially game species. There is no credible evidence that indiscriminate killing of coyotes or other predators effectively serves any genuine interest in managing other species.”

On whether wildlife killing contests decrease the loss of livestock to depredation: “[A] great deal of science has been developed on how to effectively manage depredations, including both lethal and non-lethal methods. Lessons from that science include: (i) indiscriminate killing is ineffective and it is plausible, perhaps likely, that when associated with a WKC it would lead to increased risk of depredations. A primary reason for this concern is that only some, often only a few, individual predators participate in depredation. Indiscriminate and “pre-emptive” killing of predators associated with WKC can lead to the disruption of predators’ social structure and foraging ecology in ways that increase the likelihood of depredations. ... (ii) The indiscriminate killing associated with a WKC does not target: (a) the offending predator, (b) the site where depredation has occurred, and (c) the time when depredation has occurred. This renders WKC ineffective as a means of depredation control.”

On whether wildlife killing contests increase the abundance of ungulate species, such as deer, for hunters: “[A] large body of science indicates that killing predators, especially under circumstances associated with WKC, is not a reliable means of increasing ungulate abundance. ... Even when predators are killed to the point of impairing the ecosystem services, there is still no assurance that ungulate abundance will increase. The reason being is that ungulate abundance is frequently limited by factors other than predators—factors such as habitat and climate.”

² http://www.projectcoyote.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PC_WKC-Science-Letter_Final1.17.15.pdf

What is the law?

Federal, state and local laws fail to protect wild animals from wildlife killing contests.

As of October 2017, there is no comprehensive federal law prohibiting wildlife killing contests and only a few states place restrictions on such contests. In California, it is illegal to offer a prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of wildlife in a contest, tournament or derby. Colorado prohibits advertising, conducting, promoting or participating in contests that award prizes when the object of the contest involves killing big game. Colorado allows wildlife killing contests involving small game and furbearers as long as each participant kills fewer than six of each species. While these laws in California and Colorado are good first steps, both states have loopholes that allow killing contests to continue.

Below is a summary of existing state laws that restrict wildlife killing contests:

Statute or Regulation		Summary of Law
CALIFORNIA	FGC §2003	<p>It is unlawful to offer a prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of a game bird, mammal, fish, reptile, or amphibian in an individual contest, tournament, or derby.</p> <p>The prohibition does not apply to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Frog-jumping contests – Fishing contests in the Pacific Ocean – Contests for the taking of a game bird or mammal if the total value of all prizes or other inducements is less than \$500. <p>The department may issue a permit to offer a prize or other inducement if there would be no detriment to the resource.</p>
	14 CCR § 465(b)	Pursuant to Fish & Game Code §2003, it is unlawful to offer any prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of furbearers in an individual contest, tournament, or derby.
	14 CCR § 472(e)	Pursuant to Fish and Game Code § 2003, it is unlawful to offer any prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of nongame mammals in an individual contest, tournament, or derby.
COLORADO	CO REV ST § 33-6-118	<p>It is unlawful to advertise, conduct or offer to conduct, or otherwise promote or participate in any contest or competition involving two or more persons and the monetary payment or awarding of any other prize when the object of the contest or competition involves the killing of any big game or the display for comparison of any big game or any part thereof.</p> <p>Certificates issued by organizations solely for registration and recognition of animals legally taken are not prohibited.</p>
	2 CCR 406-3 #303	<p>Contests involving small game or furbearers are allowed, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No person shall advertise, conduct, offer to conduct, promote or participate in any competitive event which involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The taking of any small game or furbearer species for which the daily bag or possession is unlimited, including but not limited to coyotes and prairie dogs. Provided, however, that such events are allowed if no more than five of each species are taken by each participant during the entire event. ○ The taking of marked or tagged small game released as part of such contest and where money or other valuable prizes are awarded for the taking of such small game and game birds. "Valuable prizes" shall not include certificates or other similar tokens of recognition not having any significant monetary value. – Commercial and noncommercial wildlife parks and field trials licensed by the Division are exempt from these provisions.

What is the law?

Organizers of killing contests target certain species because there are almost no laws protecting them. The most frequent victims—coyotes, foxes, prairie dogs and rodents—are historically stigmatized as “pests” or “varmints” and can often be killed in unlimited numbers, all year long, and using almost any method. Many state wildlife agencies fail to regulate these species at all, making them vulnerable to wildlife killing contests.



Gather information

To be an effective advocate, it is important that you are able to speak with authority about wildlife killing contests and how they impact members of the community.

Research

Conduct a simple Google search to find answers to the following questions about wildlife killing contests in your state or community.

Numbers

- How many wildlife killing contests occur in my state every year?
- How many animals are killed in these events every year?
- How many participants enter these contests?
- Which contests are the largest, in terms of number of participants or the number of animals killed?

Species

- What species of animals are targeted at the contests?
- What is the rationale for targeting this species?

Objectives

- What must the winner do in order to win a prize—kill the heaviest animal? Kill the most animals? Some other objective?

Prizes

- What is the grand prize?
- Are there door or raffle prizes?

Logistics

- What are the dates of the events?
- Where are the events located?

Rules

- Does the event have rules regarding methods of take (such as shooting, trapping, baiting, or the use of calling devices)?

- Are cruel or unsporting methods, such as baiting, hounding, or the use of calling devices allowed?
- Are there any reporting requirements?

Contest participants

- **Event organizers** are typically individuals or organizations that provide details about the event and accept registration forms—often local hunting groups.
- **Event hosts** may provide the land or the venue for the contest or the pre-hunt check-in and post-hunt celebration—this could include landowners, the Bureau of Land Management (for federal lands), the state wildlife agency (for state lands), restaurants or bars.
- **Event sponsors** are usually gun shops or hunting outfitter companies that provide financial support for the events, including the donation of weapons or other hunting gear for prizes.
- **Event beneficiaries** are individuals or groups—such as a local fire department or organization—that receive proceeds from the event as a donation. Most events do not donate to beneficiaries.

Reach out to The HSUS

Contact The HSUS and we can provide you with information about particular wildlife killing contests that we are aware of in your state and information about any efforts to restrict them. We will also give you guidance on addressing this issue in your community. Email us at wildlife@humansociety.org.

Gather information

Identify local advocates and organizations who can help

Developing a broad base of support will greatly increase the chances of ending wildlife killing contests in your community. Potential allies may be all around you. Look first in the most likely places: your family, friends and neighbors, as well as animal and environmental advocates that you know.

Next, research what other groups in your city, county and state may support efforts to end killing contests. Look for local humane societies, animal shelters, law enforcement, veterinarians, zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), wildlife rehabilitation organizations, wildlife sanctuaries accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS), civic groups, wildlife experts, people who are outspoken on animal issues and well-known and/or influential individuals.

Know your opposition

It is essential that you become knowledgeable about the various people and entities that will oppose your efforts. You should identify and understand potential objections to the proposal and be able to present well-thought-out counter arguments. Find out who is organizing, hosting, sponsoring and participating in the contests. This information will help when you go before the legislative body, the media and others to talk about the importance of the legislation or action you are proposing and why your viewpoint should be adopted over the opposition's. Make sure you are well-versed on all the arguments as to why wildlife killing contests are harmful to animals, the environment and the public.



Take action

Once you've armed yourself with knowledge about wildlife killing contests in your state, you're ready to take action.

There are three main methods for combatting wildlife killing contests in your community:

1. **Raising public awareness:** Most people are shocked to learn that wildlife killing contests are a common occurrence in their state or even their own community. Public outrage drives change for animals, and you can help spread the word using conventional media and social media.
2. **Shutting down individual contests:** Every wildlife killing contest is typically hosted or sponsored by local businesses. Placing pressure on these businesses to stop supporting or promoting wildlife killing contests may encourage contest organizers to cancel their events—a lifesaving measure that will also help build momentum for the passage of a local or state law banning wildlife killing contests.
3. **Passing laws that ban wildlife killing contests:** The ultimate goal is to prohibit wildlife killing contests in your community or state. Laws may be able to be passed on the local level—through city or county ordinances—or on the statewide level, through state legislation (passed by the state legislature) or state regulations (passed generally by state wildlife agencies).

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Most citizens are unaware that thousands of wild animals fall victim to wildlife killing contests every year, and are appalled to learn that these events may be taking place in their community. Educating the public is key to ending these cruel practices. Use the media, social media and public events to spread the message.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN “ASK”: Whenever you reach out to the public, you should always include an “ask”—tie your message to a specific action that the public can take. Examples of “asks” include asking people to:

- Contact their state lawmaker to ask them to introduce or support legislation that bans wildlife killing contests.
- Contact their city or county council member to ask them to introduce or support an ordinance that bans wildlife killing contests.
- Contact their state wildlife agency to ask them to pass a regulation that bans wildlife killing contests.
- Contact the organizer or host of a scheduled wildlife killing contest to encourage them to cancel the event.
- Contact the sponsor of a scheduled killing contests to encourage them not to sponsor future events.

Submit letters to the editor of your local paper

Letters to the editor are an important tool for influencing public opinion as it is typically the most widely read section of the newspaper. Lawmakers frequently read the opinion section to gauge the interest of their constituents on a variety of matters. The more letters submitted to the same publication that expresses similar viewpoints, the greater the likelihood that one or more letters will be published, so

Take action

encourage others to write as well. It can also help shape news coverage if editors recognize this as an important issue to readers.

The average letter to the editor is only about five or six sentences—keep it short and direct. Some papers list their word count limit in the letters section. Your main point (i.e., wildlife killing contests are cruel and dangerous) should be clearly stated in the beginning of the letter to grab the reader’s attention. Don’t forget to include an “ask” (i.e., the action you want readers to take after reading your letter). Timing is also important, so submit your letter before a wildlife killing contest is scheduled to occur or prior to key legislative actions. This guide contains a few examples of letters to the editor that you can adapt for your needs, and [here](#) are some tips on writing and submitting letters.

Submit an opinion piece to your local paper

Opinion editorial pieces (commonly known as “op-eds”) are similar to letters, but they are longer and provide more context regarding a particular issue. While letters to the editor may be around 250 words or fewer, op-eds may be 500 to 800 words. Media outlets are more likely to publish op-eds written by individuals who have authority on a particular issue or are seen as a leader in their community. Outline your stake in the issue—are you a business owner, veterinarian, wildlife rehabilitator, animal shelter or rescue worker or volunteer, scientist, member of academia, hunter, hiker, wildlife watcher, or parent, school or community association concerned with animal welfare, the environment or public safety? Say so! Your main point (i.e., wildlife killing contests are cruel and dangerous) should be clearly stated in the beginning of the op-ed to grab the reader’s attention. Don’t forget to include an “ask” (i.e., the action you want readers to take after reading your op-ed). Timing is also important, so submit your letter before a wildlife killing contest is scheduled to occur or prior to key legislative actions.



Spread the word on social media

Engage your network on social media to help combat wildlife killing contests. Inform them of scheduled wildlife killing contests and important legislative actions and ask them to get involved by submitting letters to the editor, contacting the event sponsor or host and joining your coalition. Social media is a great way to find like-minded individuals who will help you in your mission! Our guide includes a sample share graphic, tweets and Facebook posts.

Attend a town hall meeting in your community

A good way to raise awareness is to attend a town hall meeting where your local elected official(s) or other lawmaker(s) will be present. Typically there is an opportunity to present public comment or ask a question. This is an ideal opportunity to discuss why wildlife killing contests should be prohibited and put the issue right before the decision-makers for a comment.

Organize a public education event in your community

If you have a strong grasp on the issue and how it impacts your community, consider hosting a public event to educate fellow citizens and encourage them to take action. You'll want to invite key stakeholders to co-host, speak at or attend the event—including local elected officials or state lawmakers. Reach out to The HSUS for guidance at wildlife@humanesociety.org.

SHUTTING DOWN INDIVIDUAL CONTESTS

Targeting specific, scheduled wildlife killing contests in your state is an effective method for combatting the blood sport. When public outrage forces contest organizers to cancel their events, it sends a message to the community that wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated and helps build momentum for policy changes.

Contact event hosts and sponsors

Restaurants or bars often host wildlife killing contest-related activities, including kick-off events and post-contest celebrations, while gun shops or hunting outfitter companies frequently sponsor and donate prizes to the event. Local businesses are sensitive to public scrutiny and simply reaching out to them to express your disapproval of their involvement and to educate them about wildlife killing contests may be enough to convince them to withdraw their support. Without an event location and financial support, contest organizers may be forced to cancel their events. You can find out who's hosting and/or sponsoring a wildlife killing contest event by taking a look at the event's advertisement, website or Facebook page. Hosts typically provide the land to be used for hunting or the venue for the pre-hunt check-in and post-hunt celebration. Hosts could include landowners (including public landowners such as the Bureau of Land Management), restaurants, bars, fire stations or others. Sponsors often provide financial support, including raffle and door prizes, and are easily spotted as they're usually listed on the event's website. Call, email, send a letter or contact hosts and sponsors on social media and politely ask them not to support this event in the future. Online petitions can be used as well to both educate people and urge the event host and/or sponsor to stop supporting events like this in the future. We have included sample host/sponsor letters in this guide.

PASSING STRONGER LAWS THAT BAN WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

You can make long lasting change by working in your community to pass laws that prohibit or restrict wildlife killing contests. These laws might address wildlife killing contests for all wildlife species or only for certain species, depending on the existing legal framework in each state. For example, in 2017 The Humane Society of the United States and other groups helped to successfully pass a two-year moratorium on wildlife killing contests involving cownose rays in Maryland.

An animal's strongest advocate to influence and change laws is you. As a constituent, you have the most power to influence your local and state officials. You just need patience, commitment and the determination to communicate with those who represent you on the local and/or state level. There are three main processes for securing laws that ban or restrict wildlife killing contests:

Take action

1. **Local governing body:** Ordinances are laws created by municipalities. You can work with elected officials in your county or city to determine if state law allows the locality to pass ordinances that ban wildlife killing contests within municipal limits. Local ordinances make a difference and can serve as building blocks for statewide legislation.
2. **State legislature:** State legislatures generally have broad authority to pass laws regulating the taking of fish and wildlife within the state. In 2017, the Maryland state legislature passed a law that placed a two-year moratorium on cownose ray wildlife killing contests.
3. **State wildlife management agency:** A state's wildlife management agency typically has the power, granted to them by the state's legislature or the state's constitution, to promulgate regulations pertaining to the taking or hunting of fish and wildlife within the state. Though it may vary from state to state, most state wildlife management agencies will have the power to pass regulations restricting wildlife killing contests—as the California Fish and Game Commission did in 2014.

The following information will help get you started on creating policy changes on the state and local levels.

Work with your local officials to pass an ordinance in your community

You've already done all your research on wildlife killing contests in your community—now put that knowledge into action! You can make a significant difference by getting your city or town to pass an ordinance that bans wildlife killing contests. Here are some suggested action steps:

Prepare your materials

Convert your research into concise factsheets to use in your efforts to pass an ordinance. You will need a short (no more than one or two pages) factsheet explaining the problem and why a ban is needed. Include general information as well as specific problems about wildlife killing contests in your community. This guide contains sample factsheets that you can adapt for your needs.

Learn the process

The process for enacting local legislation varies around the country, so take the time to become familiar with how things work in your community. An official or employee in your local government may be able to help you. Attend a few meetings of the governing body you hope to influence. Listen to the kinds of questions they ask and the issues they take most seriously. By understanding their general concerns, you will be able to craft your arguments accordingly.

Find a friend in office

Public officials tend to take constituents' interests seriously, so try talking to your own councilmember, county commissioner or alderman first. As much as we would like the people we vote for to agree with



In 2017, the Maryland legislature passed a law placing a moratorium on cruel cownose ray killing contests.

Take action

us, this may not always be the case. If your own council member is not interested, do not despair. Try to find another official with an interest in animal issues and pitch your idea to her or him. Often, your local animal control bureau or nonprofit humane society can point you towards a sympathetic decision-maker.

Helpful tips for your meeting

Before any meeting with a councilmember, research the person you'll be meeting with as much as you can, develop an agenda and prepare a packet of the materials you developed to leave with the councilmember. For helpful tips on meeting with your councilmember, please go [here](#).

Dress professionally and be cordial. Practice your presentation ahead of time. If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the official you will find out and get back to them. Do not be discouraged if the official agrees with only a portion of your proposal. Compromise is often necessary in legislative advocacy. Be candid on what entities will likely oppose the ordinance.

Be prepared to explain that:

- There is growing public awareness of, and opposition to, wildlife killing contests.
- Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is out of step with the way most Americans believe animals should be treated. Wildlife killing contests are no different from dogfighting or cockfighting, which have been condemned as blood sports and outlawed in all 50 states.
- Wildlife killing contests are cruel and unsporting.
- Wildlife killing contests are counterproductive to sound wildlife management. Contest organizers perpetuate baseless myths and exaggerated claims about “pest” species to justify wildlife killing contests. All species are important to natural ecosystems, and indiscriminate killing of certain species can create significant wildlife management problems.
- Wildlife killing contests are a public safety risk, glorifying violence and sending a message to our youth that killing is fun. There is a well-documented link between animal cruelty and other violent criminal behaviors.
- As of June 2017, California, Colorado and Maryland ban or restrict certain types of wildlife killing contests.
- The proposed ordinance does not ban hunting—it simply prohibits contests or competitions where the objective is to kill wildlife for prizes or other inducements.
- Prohibiting wildlife killing contests in your community will not harm the economy. In fact, wildlife killing contests are a blot on the communities where they take place. Wildlife killing contests, like dogfighting, are the province of a small subculture that is rarely glimpsed by the general public. Far more tourism dollars are spent on wildlife watching and other ecotourism activities.

Promptly follow up on your meeting by sending a letter or email thanking the official for their time, briefly re-stating your position and responding to any unanswered questions that came up during the meeting.

Take action

Develop a proposed ordinance

Next, you will need a proposed ordinance to present to the city or county officials. It is important to make sure that you and legislative experts on the issue thoroughly review the language that you submit. The HSUS has significant experience in drafting, lobbying for and defending animal protection legislation and we may be able to provide guidance on a particular state or local proposal—please email us at wildlife@humanesociety.org.

Key provisions of an ordinance often include:

- Clear definitions of the animals to be covered and the activities prohibited.
- Enforcement provisions and a penalty clause.
- The date the ordinance goes into effect.

Provisions to consider when drafting an ordinance:

- **Species covered:** Is the goal to include all wildlife species or only certain species that are primarily targeted in the killing contests in your community? Ordinances that include more species may draw more opposition.
- **Activities prohibited:** Which contest-related activities need to be banned? California’s law is narrow in scope in that it only prohibits the offering of a prize or other inducement for the taking of wildlife, while Colorado’s law prohibits advertising, conducting, offering to conduct, promoting or participating in a contest. A narrower bill will be easier to pass but may have loopholes that allow some bad actors off the hook.
- **Contest objectives:** What types of contests need to be banned? In some contests, the objective is to kill the greatest number of wildlife. In other contests, the goal is to kill the heaviest animal or to win the most points (e.g., 3 points per bobcat, 2 points per coyote, 1 point per fox). To avoid significant loopholes a broad prohibition may be necessary—after all, if you ban only contests in which the goal is to kill the most animals, organizers can easily switch their contests to the point system or to the heaviest animal, or even create a new category—such as “fluffiest tail!” Thus, some jurisdictions have focused on banning contests that have the objective of “taking or hunting wildlife.”
- **Contest prizes:** Colorado limits the scope of its law by exempting contests where the “prize” for killing animals is a certificate or other similar token of recognition that lacks any significant monetary value. Ideally a state or local law would ban contest even if the only “prize” for killing wildlife is “entertainment.”

While a comprehensive ban on a wide range of killing contests involving all wildlife is the most protective, keep in mind that broad bills draw more opposition. Consider the political climate in your community and the public’s appetite for a killing contest ban. You may have better success if you limit the scope of the ordinance.

Build a coalition

Getting a local ordinance enacted takes real effort and requires meeting with councilmembers, testifying at council meetings and garnering support from others for the ordinance. Even in big cities, it can be common for very few people to get involved in local government (which means a small group of people are often changing laws and policies). Getting active support from diverse groups in the community can make or break the legislation you are trying to pass.

Take action

Some of the people who should be involved in your efforts at some point (and whom you may call upon to reach out to their own group's members, and to engage their own media contacts) include:

- Wildlife rehabilitators
- Veterinarians
- Conservation or environmental organizations
- Animal advocates
- Like-minded sportsmen and sportswomen
- Local chambers of commerce or visitor or tourism bureaus
- Animal shelters, rescue groups or other animal welfare organizations
- Local tourism and recreation guides and businesses
- Outdoor clubs for hikers, birdwatchers, canoeing and kayaking
- Veterinary professionals
- Parent, school or community associations concerned with child safety and development

Start reaching out to your list of individuals and groups to garner support for your ordinance. Let them know of your efforts and secure letters of support and commitments to meet with their elected officials, attend and/or testify at hearings and conduct outreach to other community residents.



Prepare for opposition

While every community is different, the odds are that someone in your area will oppose the ordinance. Be sure to prepare the sponsor of the ordinance with information about the opponent's concerns and the data, facts and talking points to address them, well in advance of a public hearing. Creating a short factsheet with common arguments and answers can be very helpful to your sponsor.

Generate support using social media

You can use tools like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to spread the word, garner support, post alerts and keep followers updated on developments such as upcoming hearings and votes. It can also be used to reach out to legislators and urge their support for pending legislation.

Incorporate the use of a hashtag (#) in your postings. Be mindful that using too many hashtags can clutter a post and make it more difficult to read. Keep it short, for example #YesOn317 or #BanWildlifeKillingContests or #No2WildlifeKillingContests.

Use the media to persuade public opinion

Submit letters to the editor and opinion pieces (also called op-eds), and request to meet with the newspaper's editorial board to encourage them to weigh in supporting your position. Cultivate a relationship with local reporters and keep them updated on developments.

Lobby elected officials

Take action

Once a public hearing has been scheduled, make every effort to ensure that you have the votes you need for the ordinance to pass. Ensure that you have met with every councilmember or commissioner, provided your information packets and responded to their concerns. Don't be afraid to ask whether you have their vote. Encourage as many residents as possible to write to and call their legislators. Reach out to your coalition partners to help publicize the issue and issue a call to action through alerts and letters. The key is to convince a majority of the councilpersons to vote in your favor.

Public hearing

Once your elected officials call a public meeting to discuss your proposal, you will need to determine who will testify at the hearing and get others to attend. Work closely with the ordinance sponsor on how best to present your case to legislators. The sponsor may recommend limiting the number of speakers.

Plan ahead of time to make sure that everyone does not speak on the exact same points (a common problem at public hearings). You most likely will have very limited time (probably only three to five minutes per person), so dividing talking points among a handful of speakers can ensure that all of your key arguments are heard. It is especially influential if you can get those who will be enforcing the ordinance—animal control officers, sheriff's deputies or other law enforcement officials (this varies by community)—to testify in favor of the ordinance. Professionals in uniform add an additional air of importance and mainstream acceptance to an issue.

Also, it is a good idea to make sure the elected officials can readily identify those in attendance who are in support of the ordinance. Create stickers/buttons for people to wear or matching t-shirts with messages that state support for the ordinance.

Follow up after the hearing

Oftentimes, an issue is not voted on at the time of a public hearing. During the hearing, take careful notes on who speaks in opposition to the ordinance, what their arguments are and how the elected officials respond to them. Also note what questions the elected officials ask. This will help you provide information to legislators following the hearing to help alleviate any specific concerns that may result in them opposing the ordinance. Check in with the sponsor of the legislation to debrief about the public hearing and decide on what steps to take next.

After the vote

If a vote is taken and you win, celebrate! But bear in mind that the campaign may not yet be over. While careful legislative drafting is key to ensuring that a bill survives any lawsuits, it is important to monitor and consult with experts on any legal challenges in the courts or further action by the legislature. If the ordinance passes, inform relevant law enforcement agencies of the change.

If you lose, take all you have learned during the campaign and put it to good use when you try again. It can often take several attempts before a proposed ordinance passes, so do not be discouraged if your first effort fails. Talk to council members who opposed the bill and discuss what changes could be made to garner their support for a future bill. Remember that regardless of the outcome, you educated many people with your message. Public education is critical to the success of any animal welfare campaign and, over time, an educated public can push for positive changes in the lives of animals.

Contact your state legislators

You may consider working on state legislation to ban wildlife killing contests instead of, or in addition to, pursuing a local ordinance. First, email us at wildlife@humanesociety.org to see if The HSUS is already working with your state legislature. Next, contact your own state lawmakers by phone, email and postal mail and politely urge them to pass a ban on wildlife killing contests in your state and ask for a meeting. You can find your state legislators and their contact information [here](#). For helpful tips on lobbying, including [calling elected officials](#), go [here](#), and follow the steps outlined above under “Work with your local officials to pass an ordinance in your county/city.”

Contact your state wildlife agency

It is important that your state’s wildlife management agency hear from constituents who oppose these cruel contests as well. Call, email and write to your agency and politely ask them to pass regulations banning wildlife killing contests. You might also consider attending a public agency or commission meeting to express your concern about wildlife killing contests and to urge them to pass a ban during the public comment portion of the meeting. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies maintains a list of state wildlife agencies [here](#). Email us at wildlife@humanesociety.org to see if The HSUS is working with your state wildlife agency on killing contest regulations.



Sample letters to the editor

These samples can be used for inspiration, but do not copy and submit these samples verbatim as newspapers prefer to print letters that are unique submissions to their publication. To have the most impact, be sure to include additional details with specifics about wildlife killing contests in your community.

Cancel killing contest event [GENERAL]

It is shameful that [ORGANIZATION] is hosting a [SPECIES] killing contest on [DAY AND DATE].

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel. These events violate the hunting principles of fair chase and respect for animals and their habitats. Sponsors and organizers of the event reward contestants with cash and prizes for killing the most or the largest animals. Competitive and indiscriminate killing of live animals for “fun” or prizes is unethical.

Participants often use high-tech equipment such as powerful weapons and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events—left to die from starvation, predation, or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often treated like trash.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye and sends a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays.

[ORGANIZATION] should cancel this reprehensible event as it puts a blot on our community. Unethical, unscientific and ineffective contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship.

Cancel killing contest event [COYOTE]

It is shameful that [ORGANIZATION] is hosting a coyote killing contest on [DAY AND DATE].

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel. These events violate the hunting principles of fair chase and respect for animals and their habitats. Sponsors and organizers of the event reward contestants with cash and prizes for killing the most animals or the largest animal. Competitive and indiscriminate killing of live animals for “fun” or prizes is unethical.

Killing coyotes disrupts their social structure, which encourages more breeding and migration, and in the end, results in more coyotes. Additionally, the favorite prey of coyotes consists of rodents and rabbits. Studies show that coyotes balance their ecosystems, such as by indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye and sends a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays.

[ORGANIZATION] should cancel this reprehensible event as it puts a blot on our community. Unethical, unscientific and ineffective contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship.

Pass ordinance to ban wildlife killing contests

Most people are shocked to learn that wildlife killing contests—a blood sport akin to dogfighting—occur right here in [COMMUNITY]. In these nefarious contests, participants compete to kill the most or the largest animals for cash or prizes. Cruel and unsporting, these contests target historically stigmatized species because there are almost no laws protecting them. Purporting to be ridding the environment of “pests,” participants perpetuate baseless myths to justify the bloodshed. But wildlife killing contests are out of step with science and are counterproductive to sound wildlife management. Please encourage your councilmember to pass [ORDINANCE] to ban this horrific blood sport from our community.



Sample opinion pieces (op-eds)

These samples can be used for inspiration, but do not copy and submit these samples verbatim as newspapers prefer to print op-eds that are unique submissions to their publication.

Op-ed #1: Cancel wildlife killing contest [GENERAL]

[ORGANIZATION] is hosting a [SPECIES] killing contest on [DAY AND DATE]. In wildlife killing contests, contestants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem. [ORGANIZATION] should put an end to this blot on our community.

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of “fair chase”—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most animals, participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful weapons and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often treated like trash.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest hunting advocacy organization in the United States, has spoken out against such events. Its Big Game Records Committee issued a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of hunting are to allow fair chase, not to use animals as live targets, and to protect mothers and their dependent young. Cash awards, prizes and bragging rights are not legitimate reasons to kill animals. These shameful contests are also the very definition of casual killing, which the NAMWC also condemns.

In The Wildlife Society/Boone and Crockett 2012 Technical Review of the NAMWC, a sportsman is defined as someone who derives no financial profit from game killed and will not waste any game that is killed. Wildlife killing contests are antithetical to this, as the point is to win cash and prizes for animals killed for non-subsistence purposes.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. The most common victims of killing contests are those deemed to be “pests” because there are almost no laws protecting them. But a recent study shows that American attitudes towards animals—especially historically stigmatized animals such as wolves or coyotes—have changed in a positive overall trend in the last several decades, compared to data from similar studies in both 1978 and 2014. Attitudes towards coyotes, one of the most misunderstood and persecuted species in the United States and the most frequent victims of killing contests, were significantly more positive, increasing by 47% among those surveyed in 2014. Overall, coyotes are generally well-liked. This goes to show that

Sample opinion pieces (op-eds)

the American public—in whose trust all wildlife are held, according to the NAMWC—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Additionally, wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. Some species respond with an increase in numbers, so that their population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the role that all native species play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane, or unsustainable such as competitions for killing the most animals.

Newspaper pictures of stacks of bloody carcasses send the wrong message about our state to the rest of the country. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated by a modern society.

Unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship. In the interest of creating a more humane community, [EVENT] should be canceled.

Op-ed #2: Cancel killing contest event [COYOTE]

[ORGANIZATION] is hosting a coyote killing contest on [DAY AND DATE]. In wildlife killing contests, contestants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem. [ORGANIZATION] should put an end to this blot on our community.

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most animals, contest participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful weapons and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often treated like trash.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club has spoken out against such events, and its Big Game Records Committee issued a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of hunting are to allow fair chase, not to use animals as live targets, and to protect mothers and their dependent young. Cash awards, prizes and bragging rights are not legitimate reasons to kill animals. And killing contests are the very definition of casual killing, which the NAMWC also condemns.

Sample opinion pieces (op-eds)

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. A recent study shows that American attitudes towards animals have changed in a positive overall trend in the last several decades, comparing data from similar studies in both 1978 and 2014. Attitudes towards coyotes were significantly more positive, increasing by 47% among those surveyed in 2014. Overall, the survey found that coyotes are generally well-liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife are held, according to the NAMWC—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

While coyotes are routinely persecuted and exploited in these events, public acceptance of coyotes and other large carnivores is increasing. Animals that were once stigmatized, such as bats, sharks and coyotes, are now appreciated as critical components to a functioning ecosystem and who are deserving of compassion and conservation, as opposed to a previous ethos of domination and mastery over wild animals.

Wildlife killing contests are counterproductive to conservation purposes. They are not an effective method for managing wildlife, yet contest organizers frequently try to justify their events with claims that they are doing a service by eliminating “varmints.” Culling coyotes and other wildlife under a misguided belief system that “reducing predators” will boost ungulate herds like deer and elk, or will make livestock safer, is not supported by the best available science.

Specifically, persecution of coyotes disrupts their social structure, which, ironically, encourages more breeding and migration and in the end results in more coyotes. Furthermore, indiscriminate killing of native carnivores fails to target problem animals, and can actually lead to an increase in conflicts with livestock. Finally, coyotes play a large role in controlling rodent populations and other species often considered “pests.” Instead of killing rodents with poisons or cruel traps, allowing coyotes to live on the land provides us with a cost-effective, natural alternative for control of rodents.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the vital role that native carnivores play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable, such as competitions to kill the largest number of animals.

Newspaper pictures of stacks of bloody carcasses send the wrong message about our state to the rest of the country. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated by a modern society.

Unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship. In the interest of creating a more humane community, [EVENT] should be canceled.

Sample letters to sponsor/host

Add a paragraph about problems with specific wildlife killing contests in your community.

Letter to sponsor/host [GENERAL]

[DATE]

[SPONSOR/HOST ADDRESS]

Dear [SPONSOR or HOST],

We noticed that you are a sponsor of the upcoming event [NAME OF KILLING CONTEST], scheduled for [DATE] in [TOWN], and are writing to ask you not to support this event in the future. Despite its innocuous-sounding name, this “contest” is simply a bloodbath for entertainment, with contestants competing for prize money to see who can kill the [EVENT DETAILS] in a specified period of time. We believe that you should not sponsor future stagings of this event for the following reasons.

Wildlife killing contests are a far cry from traditional fair chase hunting, nor are they sound wildlife management practices. They create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed, and the population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest was conducted.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club has spoken out against such events; their Big Game Records Committee issued a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of hunting are to allow fair chase, not to use animals as live targets and to protect mothers and their dependent young. Cash awards, prizes and bragging rights are certainly not legitimate reasons to kill animals, and killing contests are the very definition of casual killing, which the NAMWC also condemns.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye and sends a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is unethical and out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests are not tolerated by a modern society.

In the interest of creating a more humane community, we ask that you not sponsor this cruel, pointless, unsporting and ecologically damaging event in the future.

We thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sample letters to sponsor/host

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[ORGANIZATION]

[CITY, TOWN]

Letter to sponsor/host [COYOTE]

[DATE]

[SPONSOR ADDRESS]

Dear [SPONSOR or HOST],

We noticed that you are a sponsor of the upcoming event [NAME OF KILLING CONTEST], scheduled for [DATE] in [TOWN], and are writing to ask you not to support this event in the future. Despite its innocuous-sounding name, this “contest” is simply a bloodbath for entertainment, with contestants competing for prize money to see who can kill the [EVENT DETAILS] in a specified period of time. By refusing to sponsor this event in the future, we believe that you can help put an end to this blot on our community.

Wildlife killing contests are a far cry from traditional fair chase hunting, nor are they sound wildlife management. While coyotes are routinely persecuted and exploited in these events, public acceptance of coyotes and other large carnivores is increasing. Animals that were once stigmatized, such as bats, sharks, wolves and coyotes, are now appreciated as critical components of a functioning ecosystem who are deserving of compassion and conservation, as opposed to a previous ethos of domination and mastery over wild animals. This should be translated into rethinking organized killing contests of wild animals.

Killing coyotes disrupts their social structure, which encourages more breeding and migration and in the end results in more coyotes. Additionally, coyotes’ favorite prey consists of rodents and rabbits. Studies show that coyotes balance their ecosystems, such as by indirectly protecting ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club has spoken out against such events, and its Big Game Records Committee issued a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), which embraces the public trust doctrine, holds that wildlife belongs to everyone. The basic tenets of hunting are to allow fair chase, not to use animals as live targets and to protect mothers and their dependent young. Cash awards, prizes and bragging rights are certainly not legitimate reasons to kill animals. Wildlife killing contests are the very definition of casual killing, which the NAMWC also condemns.

Sample letters to sponsor/host

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and wildlife agencies a black eye and sends a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun. Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is unethical and out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests are not tolerated by a modern society.

In the interest of creating a more humane community, we ask that you do not sponsor this cruel, pointless and ecologically damaging event in the years ahead.

We thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[ORGANIZATION]

[CITY, TOWN]



Sample social media items

Sample Facebook posts

1. Wildlife killing contests that offer cash and prizes for killing the most amount of animals have no place in modern society. Please urge [HOST] to not host [EVENT] in [TOWN] taking place on [DATE].
2. Killing wildlife for cash and prizes and dumping their bodies like trash is not “tradition” or wildlife management. Please urge [SPONSOR] not to sponsor events like this in the future.
3. [CITY/COUNTY COUNCIL] is considering an ordinance to ban wildlife killing contests in [CITY/COUNTY]. This cruel blood sport has no place in modern society, and especially not in our community. Please urge your councilmember to vote YES on [Ordinance].

Sample Tweets

1. Modern society does not tolerate the killing of animals for prizes or bragging rights. Cancel [EVENT]. #endwildlifekillingcontests
2. Killing wildlife for cash and prizes is not entertainment. Cancel [EVENT]. #endwildlifekillingcontests
3. Urge your councilmember to vote YES to ban wildlife killing contests in [COMMUNITY] #YesOn618

Sample graphic to go along with social media posts:



Sample factsheets

Factsheet #1:

WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS ARE CRUEL AND INEFFECTIVE

Gratuitously slaughtering animals for thrills and prizes is unethical and out of step with our current understanding of ecosystems and the important role each species plays.

Wildlife killing contests are a problem in our community

Every year, wild animals are killed for prizes and entertainment in competitive killing contests. At the [local event name] in [location], participants compete to kill [species] for the prospect of winning [prize info]. The goal is to kill [as many animals as possible / the heaviest animal / etc]. [Add info about any cruel practices used during the hunt or other details.]

Wildlife killing contests are nothing more than a blood sport

These events are similar to dogfighting or cockfighting, which have been outlawed in every state. They glorify killing and send a dangerous message to our youth that killing is fun and that life is of little value. Wildlife killing contests are antithetical to hunting principles that dictate respect for wildlife and their environment. Participants in these horrific events are part of a small subculture rarely glimpsed by the general public. Even the Boone and Crockett Club, a widely respected hunting and outdoor organization, “does not support programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.”

Wildlife killing contests fail to address wildlife conflict issues and may increase problems

Participants in wildlife killing contests justify the bloodshed with baseless myths about “pest” species. But wildlife killing contests are out of step with our current understanding of the importance of all species in natural ecosystems. What’s more, wildlife killing contests can create wildlife management problems by disrupting the hierarchical order within wildlife family structures.

Wildlife killing contests are a blot on our community

Far more tourism dollars are spent on wildlife watching and other ecotourism activities than on wildlife killing contests. Those who value wildlife and respect nature abhor wildlife killing contests and will avoid locations that cater to that subculture.

A ban on wildlife killing contests will protect our wildlife, our economy, and the public

It’s time to close the history book on this blood sport. We must ban organizing, sponsoring, promoting, conducting or participating in any contest, competition, tournament or derby with the objective of taking or hunting wildlife for prizes or other inducement, or for entertainment.

Factsheet #2:

END COYOTE KILLING CONTESTS

Thousands of coyotes die every year in wildlife killing contests—a little known blood sport in which participants compete to kill the most or the largest coyote for cash or prizes. Coyotes are mercilessly shot or trapped during these events, their bodies weighed and counted, and then frequently dumped—no longer needed after the prizes have been awarded.

Cruel and unsporting

Deemed by some to be “pests,” coyotes are targeted during these events because there are almost no laws protecting them. Across the United States they can often be killed in unlimited numbers, all year long, and using almost any method. Participants frequently use high-tech equipment that gives them a significant advantage over the animal—a violation of the fundamental hunting ethic known as “fair chase.”

One of the most chilling aspects of coyote killing contests is the use of electronic calling devices to attract coyotes into rifle range with sounds that imitate the cry of a coyote in distress. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear this cry for help, they come to investigate. Manipulating animals’ natural compassion to lure them into gun range is not hunting—it is a reprehensible practice condemned by hunters and non-hunters alike.

Dependent young may also be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure.

Baseless myths to justify the bloodshed

Shooters piously claim to be helping society by ridding the environment of “varmints.” But there is a general misunderstanding and fear of coyotes. Claims that coyotes attack children and pets, threaten livestock and diminish populations of game animals that “belong” to hunters are greatly exaggerated and out of step with modern scientific understanding of the importance of coyotes and other native carnivores.

Counterproductive to sound wildlife management

Coyotes play a vital role in healthy ecosystems. They provide a number of free, natural ecological services: helping to control disease transmission, cleaning up carrion (animal carcasses), keeping rodent populations in check, increasing biodiversity, removing sick animals from the gene pool and protecting crops.

Indiscriminate killing of native carnivores like coyotes may reduce their populations temporarily, but the best available science demonstrates that these species will respond with an increase in numbers. Wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. In the case of coyotes, this disruption allows more coyotes to produce and can increase conflicts with livestock.

Like dogfighting, coyote killing contests should be banned

Cockfighting and dogfighting have been banned in all 50 states and so, too, should these contests. Though coyotes are a historically stigmatized species, a recent study by researchers at Ohio State University found that between 1978 and 2014, positive attitudes toward coyotes grew by 47 percent, with the majority of respondents expressing positive attitudes toward coyotes.

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and our community a black eye. We should pass a ban on organizing, sponsoring, promoting, conducting or participating in any contest, competition, tournament or derby with the objective of taking or hunting wildlife for prizes or other inducement, or for entertainment.

Sample testimony

There is normally a time limit of about three minutes for oral testimony in meetings of commissions and councils, so please consider keeping your remarks brief and concise. You might also coordinate with other advocates to ensure that you don't duplicate each other's testimony and instead each focus on a specific topic. For example, one person can talk about how wildlife killing contests are cruel and disrupt family units, another can focus on the lack of science supporting the contests and another can focus on how the contests violate the principles of sportsmanship and fair chase in hunting.

Testimony in support of an ordinance to ban general wildlife killing contests

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I respectfully urge you to support [ORDINANCE], an act to prohibit wildlife killing contests in [LOCALITY].

As a resident of [LOCALITY], I was disturbed to learn that a wildlife killing contest called the [EVENT NAME] is being conducted right here in my community. I, and many other citizens and community leaders, ask that you pass [ORDINANCE] to end this cruel spectacle.

Participants in wildlife killing contests compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem.

Wildlife killing contests are also unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of “fair chase”—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most animals, participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful weapons and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often treated like trash.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest hunting advocacy organization in the U.S., has issued a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These killing contests flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. A recent study by Ohio State University shows that American attitudes towards animals—especially historically stigmatized animals such as coyotes—have greatly improved in the last several decades. Overall, coyotes are generally well-liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife is held—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Sample testimony

Additionally, wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. Some species respond with an increase in numbers, so that their population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the role that all native species play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable, such as competitions for killing the most animals.

In the interest of creating a more humane community, I ask that you vote yes for [ORDINANCE]. Your support will send a powerful message that [LOCALITY] cares about the responsible management of our state's natural resources and protecting our wildlife from cruelty. Thank you.

Testimony in support of an ordinance to ban coyote killing contests

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I respectfully urge you to support [ORDINANCE], an act to prohibit coyote killing contests in [LOCALITY].

In these contests, participants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem. We should put an end to this blot on our community.

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of fair chase—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most animals, contest participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful weapons and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often treated like trash.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest hunting advocacy organization in the U.S., has a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These events flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions. Instead, they glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. A recent study shows that American attitudes towards coyotes have significantly improved in the last few decades. Overall, the survey found that coyotes are generally well-liked. This goes to show that the American public recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Sample testimony

Wildlife killing contests are also not effective at managing wildlife. Culling coyotes and other wildlife under a misguided belief system that “reducing predators” will boost ungulate herds like deer and elk, or will make livestock safer, is not supported by the best available science.

This is because persecution of coyotes disrupts their social structure, which, ironically, encourages more breeding and migration and in the end results in more coyotes. Furthermore, indiscriminate killing of native carnivores fails to target problem animals, and can actually lead to an increase in conflicts with livestock. Finally, coyotes play a large role in controlling rodent populations and other species often considered “pests.”

Unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship and are an embarrassment to [locality]. In the interest of creating a more humane community, I ask that you vote yes for [ordinance]. Thank you.

Testimony on support for a ban on coyote killing contests from wildlife management experts

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I respectfully urge you to support [ORDINANCE], an act to prohibit coyote killing contests in [LOCALITY].

I would like to address some of the misinformation about the effectiveness of these contests, which are actually counterproductive to conservation purposes. Contest organizers may try to justify their actions with claims that they are doing a service by eliminating “varmints,” or that killing coyotes and other native carnivores will somehow boost ungulate herds like deer and elk or will make livestock safer. But those claims are not supported by the best available science, as the following statements from those with experience in wildlife management will attest to.

In August of 2016, the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners stated that, “[T]he wildlife management profession does not generally recognize the use of contests as a tool with substantial wildlife management effect.”

Michael Sutton, former President of the California Fish and Game Commission, has said, “Awarding prizes for wildlife killing contests is both unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of natural systems. Such contests are an anachronism and have no place in modern wildlife management.”

Larry Shoen, a farmer and a Commissioner on the Board of County Commissioners in Blaine County, Idaho, said, “Shooting contests conducted in the name of killing animals for fun, money and prizes is just not consistent with the values of most people in the modern world.”

Ted Chu, the Supervisor of Idaho Fish and Game, has said, “I have hunted all of my adult life. Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest

Sample testimony

animals. The supporters of these sorts of activities would no doubt claim to be great defenders of hunting, yet they go out of their way to publicly present the worst possible image of hunting.”

And Ray Powell, 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.”

I and so many other citizens of [LOCALITY] agree with Mr. Powell and the others I quoted. These unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship or sound natural resources management and are a blot on our community.

With this in mind, I ask that you vote yes for [ORDINANCE]. Thank you.

Testimony on support for a ban on coyote killing contests from scientists

You could also print out a copy of the letter cited below, which you can find at http://www.projectcoyote.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PC_WKC-Science-Letter_Final1.17.15.pdf, and include it with your written testimony.

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is [NAME]. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I respectfully urge you to support [ORDINANCE], an act to prohibit cruel and ineffective wildlife killing contests in [LOCALITY].

Some killing contest organizers or participants may try to justify their actions by claiming they are doing a service by eliminating “varmints,” or that killing coyotes and other native carnivores will somehow boost ungulate herds like deer and elk or will make livestock safer. But those claims are simply not supported by the best available science.

In fact, in a letter in January 2015, more than 50 preeminent scientists across North America called for a prohibition on wildlife killing contests. They stated: “The most general reason to prohibit WKC [wildlife killing contests] is that hunters and wildlife managers believe, as a community, that killing animals without an adequate reason is unjustified and unsportsmanlike. Killing an animal for a prize or trophy constitutes killing without an adequate reason.” And the scientists added, “There is no credible evidence that indiscriminate killing of coyotes or other predators effectively serves any genuine interest in managing other species.”

As to whether wildlife killing contests decrease the loss of livestock to depredation by carnivores, the scientists continued, “[A] great deal of science has been developed on how to effectively manage depredations, including both lethal and non-lethal methods. Lessons from that science include: (i) indiscriminate killing is ineffective and it is plausible, perhaps likely, that when associated with a WKC it would lead to increased risk of depredations. A primary reason for this concern is that only some, often only a few, individual predators participate in depredation. Indiscriminate and “pre-emptive” killing of predators associated with WKC can lead to the disruption of predators’ social structure and foraging

Sample testimony

ecology in ways that increase the likelihood of depredations. ... (ii) The indiscriminate killing associated with a WKC does not target: (a) the offending predator, (b) the site where depredation has occurred, and (c) the time when depredation has occurred. This renders WKCs ineffective as a means of depredation control.”

And regarding the claim that wildlife killing contests will somehow increase the abundance of prey species, like deer, for hunters, the scientists said in their letter: “[A] large body of science indicates that killing predators, especially under circumstances associated with WKCs, is not a reliable means of increasing ungulate abundance. ... Even when predators are killed to the point of impairing the ecosystem services, there is still no assurance that ungulate abundance will increase. The reason being is that ungulate abundance is frequently limited by factors other than predators—factors such as habitat and climate.”

With all of this in mind, I ask you to support [ORDINANCE], an act to prohibit wildlife killing contests in [LOCALITY], because they are cruel, ineffective and are not consistent with sound scientific wildlife management principles. Thank you.

Sample letter to policymakers

Dear [LEGISLATOR, COMMISSIONER, OR COUNCIL MEMBER]:

As a resident of [LOCALITY] and your constituent, I respectfully ask that you support [ORDINANCE NUMBER], an act to prohibit wildlife killing contests in [locality]. Continuing to allow such events is quite simply an embarrassment for our community.

In wildlife killing contests, contestants compete for cash and prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a specified period of time. Awarding prizes for competitive and indiscriminate killing of animals is unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of the important role each species plays in the ecosystem.

In particular, right here in our community, [share details of the local wildlife killing contest, including number of participants, methods of killing wildlife, prizes offered and for what—heaviest coyote, etc.—and what local businesses sponsored the event].

Wildlife killing contests are unsporting and cruel—a blood sport akin to dogfighting or cockfighting. They violate the hunting principles of “fair chase”—the notion that the hunter should not have an unfair advantage over the animal—and respect for animals and their habitats. To kill the most animals, participants are encouraged to use high-tech equipment such as powerful weapons and electronic calling devices, which lure animals in for an easy kill by imitating the sounds of a fellow animal in distress. Countless dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Once the prizes are awarded, the bodies of the animals are often treated like trash.

Even the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest hunting advocacy organization in the United States, has issued a statement condemning “programs, contests or competitions that directly place a bounty on game animals by awarding cash or expensive prizes for the taking of wildlife.” These killing contests flout sportsmanship ethics and outdoor traditions, and instead glorify killing and violence and send a dangerous message to younger generations of hunters who are often encouraged to participate in these events. Some so-called “traditions” need to fade away.

These contests are also inconsistent with the values of the public majority. The most common victims of killing contests are those deemed to be “pests” because there are almost no laws protecting them. But a recent study by Ohio State University shows that American attitudes towards animals—especially historically stigmatized animals such as coyotes—have changed in a positive overall trend in the last several decades. Overall, coyotes are generally well-liked. This goes to show that the American public—in whose trust all wildlife is held—recognizes the value in these wild creatures.

Additionally, wildlife killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. Some species respond with an increase in numbers, so that their population may even grow to outnumber that in the area before the killing contest.

We should consider the perspective of hunters and other recreationists who respect the role that all native species play in their ecosystems. In numerous studies, both the general public and hunters

Sample letter to policymakers

themselves object to hunting activities that are viewed as unfair, unsporting, inhumane or unsustainable, such as competitions for killing the most animals.

Newspaper pictures of stacks of bloody carcasses send the wrong message about our [locality] to the rest of the country. Like dogfighting and cockfighting, wildlife killing contests will not be tolerated by a modern society.

Unethical, unscientific and ineffective wildlife killing contests do not reflect fair sportsmanship. In the interest of creating a more humane community, I ask that you vote yes for [ORDINANCE]. Your support will send a powerful message that [LOCALITY] cares about the responsible management of our state's natural resources and protecting our wildlife from cruelty. Thank you for your consideration.

For assistance, contact wildlife@humanesociety.org.