

California wildlife managers ban prizes for competitive hunts

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(Reuters) - California wildlife managers on Wednesday banned the awarding of prizes for hunting contests targeting non-game animals like coyotes in what is believed to be the first such measure in the country aimed at lessening the appeal of such competitions.

The California Fish and Game Commission voted 4-1 to prohibit so-called inducements like cash and merchandise for hunting events tied to coyotes, foxes, bobcats and wild animals classified in the state as furbearers and non-game mammals.

The measure, which does not apply to trophy hunts for game animals like deer, was pushed by conservation groups such as Project Coyote, which has noted an increase in what it calls “wildlife-killing contests”

in Western states like California, Idaho, New Mexico and Oregon.

Concerns intensified in California this year when a coyote-hunting competition took place in a rural county in the northeastern part of the state where a wandering, protected wolf had been known to roam.

Before approving the measure, California Fish and Game President Michael Sutton said awarding prizes for killing the largest number of coyotes and other creatures was unethical and that such contests “are an anachronism and have no place in modern wildlife management.”

Project Coyote Director Camilla Fox hailed the move as a win for animals like coyotes that are seen by many ranchers as nuisance predators and are subject to generally unregulated hunting across the United States.

“This is a rare victory. And it underscores the point that

wildlife should not be killed for fun and prizes,” she said.

The move comes over a week after U.S. land managers withdrew a permit that would have allowed a wolf-hunting contest on public rangelands in Idaho, which drew 90,000 letters of opposition from around the globe.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management had approved a permit in November for hunting group Idaho for Wildlife for a so-called predator derby each January for five years on millions of acres overseen by the agency.

Conservation groups sued, and the BLM rescinded the permit, essentially forcing the competition onto smaller lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Idaho for Wildlife head Steve Adler could not be reached for comment but has said that efforts to ban derbies are led by

radical environmentalists
and animal-rights activists
seeking to restrict legal
hunting activities and gun
rights spelled out in the U.S.
Constitution.