

State to prohibit coyote hunting contests

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Regulations come in response to public opposition.

BOSTON — The state Fisheries and Wildlife Board voted Wednesday to approve regulations prohibiting contests that promote the hunting of predators and furbearers.

The vote came after multiple people voiced their opposition to such contests at public meetings throughout the year.

Hyannis-based retailer Powderhorn Outfitters launched its first coyote killing contest on the Cape in January 2018. The second annual contest ended March 10.

The contest awarded cash prizes to hunters who brought in the largest coyote and the most cumulative weight. Raffle tickets were also awarded for each coyote weighed in at the store.

In both contests, protesters bearing signs expressing their condemnation of the competition lined the road outside the store.

“It’s good news and I’m glad to see action was taken,” state Sen. Julian Cyr, D-Truro, said of the new regulations. “We were able to end these wildlife killing contests in the commonwealth and to make sure that we have scientific based wildlife management.”

After hearing the public outcry on the issue, Cyr, along with state Rep. Sarah Peake, D-Provincetown, and others in Cape delegation were able to bring the issue to the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

“This is a terrific example of constituents engaging with state government and challenging us to do better,” Cyr said.

The board also approved regulations that prohibit “wanton waste” of all wildlife taken during regulated hunting and trapping seasons, and that require hunted fox and coyote to be reported to MassWildlife within 48 hours, according to Katie Gronendyke, assistant press secretary for the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

The regulations will go into effect after MassWildlife officials sign off on them and file them with the state secretary of state’s office.

Once the new regulations are in place, it will be unlawful for any person to organize, sponsor, promote, conduct or participate in a contest for take of coyote, bobcat, red fox, gray fox, weasels, mink, skunk, river otter, muskrat, beaver, fisher, raccoon and opossum.

The new regulations will also make it unlawful for any person to waste an animal or bird while hunting or trapping. Each retrieved animal or bird that is hunted must be put to some other use, such as for food, fur, feathers or taxidermy.

The new regulations will not apply to “problem wildlife” or instances in which the above animals are killed in defense of people or property.

The 48-hour window to report the killing of fox and coyotes to MassWildlife puts them in line with regulations for deer, bear and turkey.

In response to public concern over coyote hunting contests sponsored by private entities, MassWildlife staff and the Fisheries and Wildlife board considered the best available science, consulted with other outside professionals and solicited input from stakeholders in a review of policies

and regulations associated with coyote hunting and contests, Gronendyke wrote.

MassWildlife held four listening sessions on the matter from April through June in Barnstable, Shelburne Falls, Westford and Bourne. Phone calls, letters and emails from the public were also considered.

Based on their review, MassWildlife staff presented the recommended new regulations to the Fisheries and Wildlife board, Gronendyke said. Following the presentation, the board voted to hold public hearings on the matter on Oct. 22 in Lenox and Oct. 29 in Westboro.

The state joins California, Vermont, New Mexico and Arizona as states that have enacted regulations against killing contests, according to a statement from the MSPCA-Angell.

California banned the awarding of prizes for killing furbearing and non-game mammals in 2014; New Mexico and Vermont outlawed coyote killing contests in 2019 and 2018 respectively; and Arizona prohibited contests for predatory and furearing species this year, the statement said.