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EDITORIAL:

Wildlife-killing contests have no place in civilized society

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With the Clark County Commission's approval of a resolution calling for an end to wildlife killing contests in Nevada, it's now up to the state Board of Wildlife Commissioners to decide whether to cease these slaughters masquerading as sporting competitions.

The board should do exactly that, as soon as possible.

These contests are simply savage: They reward shooters for killing as many coyotes, bobcats, rabbits or other small mammals as they can within a certain timeframe. The county's resolution notes that more than two dozen of these kill-fests have occurred in recent years across Nevada, including four in Clark County.

Worse yet, because neighboring states have taken the responsible step of banning the contests, Nevada has become a go-to state for organizers of the events.

It's past time for the wildlife commissioners to end this bloodsport.

As documented by the Yale School of the Environment in a 2018 report, the contests involve participants using dogs to flush out animals or, in the case of coyote contests, using calls that mimic wounded prey to draw them out. Then, using rifles that are often equipped with telescopic sights, they kill the animals.

"Body counts are impressive," the report says. "Example: In last January's Big Sandy American Legions' annual 'Coyote Derby' in northern Montana, 146 contestants dispatched 191 animals. Carcasses are piled or hung, photographed and, in virtually all cases, discarded."

Winners receive cash or prizes such as AR-15 rifles, the authors noted, and some events feature children's divisions.

This should not be happening in Nevada or in any other civilized society in 2021.

Supporters falsely claim that the contests are needed to reduce the predation of livestock or deer and other game animals, or cut down on wild animals preying on pets or threatening humans in populated areas.

None of those claims hold water.

Biologists say that when coyote packs are decimated, members of other packs simply move into their territory. Meanwhile, the thinned-out packs produce more pups.

In addition, the kill-offs lead to coyotes ditching their normal diet, which primarily consists of rodents and other small animals, and going after bigger animals like sheep and deer. So the claim that the contests cut down on predation of livestock and game animals is 180 degrees wrong.

In the Yale report, wildlife officials say the far more effective way to deal with animals who attack livestock or are particularly aggressive toward people is to identify and eliminate those individual animals, not indiscriminately slay every animal the eye can see.

“There is no evidence that killing coyotes in any way reduces human conflict or livestock depredation,” said Patrick Donnelly, the Nevada director of the Center for Biological Diversity, in a prepared statement on the county’s resolution. “We need to show respect for our native wildlife, not treat it as fodder in some sick bloodsport. Nevada needs to join the 21st century and end this practice today.”

Amen. We commend the environmentalists and wildlife advocates who pushed for the county resolution, and Commissioner Justin Jones for taking up the cause.

Now, state wildlife officials need to approve the request.

The Wildlife Commission last took up the issue in 2015 but voted 7-1 to allow the kill-offs to continue. This year, at least one board member is on record supporting a ban.

For its part, the Wildlife Commission says that any regulatory changes will be based on scientific information it will seek from state biologists, and not on public opinion.

OK, then let’s get the process started. We can’t imagine that the state biologists would come up with any compelling reason to continue these contests. Their counterparts certainly haven’t in other states, including California, Arizona and New Mexico, which all enacted bans in recent years. It’s also well worth noting that in those states, there’s been no reliable evidence that doing away with the contests caused widespread increase in depredation.

The bottom line is that the science simply doesn’t support these wholesale slaughters, so all we’re left with is a cruel and grossly inhumane practice. Enough. As Donnelly suggested, it’s time for Nevada to move out of the dark ages and get with the times.