

Clark County urges state to ban ‘barbaric’ wildlife killing contests

By **Shea Johnson** Las Vegas Review-Journal

Clark County commissioners on Tuesday formally urged Nevada to ban wildlife killing contests — a form of hunting competition already barred by neighboring states that activists have castigated as “unethical,” “barbaric” and a “sick bloodsport.”

In such contests, single shooters or teams of two set out at dawn to kill as many coyotes, rabbits, bobcats or other small mammals as they can, according to activists, who say that animals are then often thrown away and that lead ammunition strewn on public lands risks being ingested by wildlife and poisoning the food chain.

Participants compete for money or other prizes, the county said, and because western states such as California, Arizona and New Mexico have already banned the practice, Nevada has recently become a destination for contest organizers.

There have been more than two dozen competitions in Nevada in recent years, at least four which have occurred in the county, according to a resolution unanimously adopted by the commission imploring the Nevada Department of Wildlife “to take immediate action” to outlaw the contests.

“I am proud to have sponsored this resolution, which will help to ensure that the public is safe from stray bullets by unethical shooters in a hurry to kill as many animals as possible and protect our state’s wildlife from inhumane practices and unnecessary slaughter,” Commissioner Justin Jones said in a statement.

Ultimately the authority to establish a ban falls on the state Board of Wildlife Commissioners, a nine-member panel appointed by the governor, and not the state’s wildlife agency.

State biologists will, however, provide scientific information requested by the Wildlife Commission when the board considers any regulatory changes, which is a lengthy and public process, Nevada Department of Wildlife spokesman C. Douglas Nielsen said.

“It is not our role to determine what is acceptable to society,” Nielsen said in an email about the state agency, adding that “if the department is asked for its recommendations, they are based on science.”

Resolution supported by activists

Wildlife activists immediately praised the county’s decision, noting that it marked the first forward movement against the contests in Nevada six years

after the state Wildlife Commission voted 7-1 to deny a petition seeking to end them.

“With the passage of this historic resolution to condemn the scourge of wildlife killing contests in our state, Nevada has been put on the path toward joining the bevy of other states that have already eliminated these barbaric practices,” said Annoula Wylderich, the Nevada state director for Animal Wellness Action, in a statement.

Connie Howard, the chair of conservation and public lands for the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter, had written a letter of support stating that “nothing is more antithetical” to the club’s mission of wildlife preservation and protection than “killing contests that glorify the killing of animals purely for blood sport with the intention of seeing who can kill the most.”

And Patrick Donnelly, the Nevada state director at the Center for Biological Diversity, underscored that there was no evidence that killing coyotes reduces human conflict or the depredation of livestock.

“We need to show respect for our native wildlife, not treat it as fodder in some sick bloodsport,” Donnelly said in a statement.

In passing the resolution, commissioners also clearly delineated a distinction between the competitions and hunting. The county, according to its resolution, “values hunting as a method of food gathering, recreation, wildlife management, and protecting private property.”

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