

4/8/25

Dear Chair Sosnowski, Vice Chair Britto, Secretary Vargas, and Members of the Committee on Environment and Agriculture,

My name is David Brunetti, and I live in Burrillville, RI. I am writing to you today about Senate Bill No. 864 – which amends the Hunting and Hunting Safety Act by adding a section to Prohibit Wildlife Killing Contests in RI. I support this bill and urge you to vote in favor of it.

My testimony in favor of this bill is below. First, however, I would like to thank Senator Britto for sponsoring and introducing this bill.

In this testimony, I will cover the following items:

- 1. Wildlife Killing Contests - What are they?**
- 2. What happens during such events and why they should be prohibited in Rhode Island (and everywhere).**
- 3. Statements from Individuals, State Agencies, and Organizations which Oppose Wildlife Killing Contests.**
- 4. Prevalence.**
- 5. Not an effective wildlife management tool.**
- 6. Why is this bill needed in RI?**
- 7. What are the concerns for this bill in Rhode Island?**

1. Wildlife Killing Contests - What are they?

A wildlife killing contest, also known as a predator hunting contest by participants and organizers, is a contest, challenge, drive, tournament, derby or round-up in which the objective is for participants to kill animals within a certain timeframe for entertainment, cash, prizes, or other inducements.

These events are currently legal in Rhode Island and thirty-nine other states and currently occur in nearly every one of them.

2. What happens during such events and why they should be prohibited in Rhode Island (and everywhere).

During these contests, teams compete in judging categories that typically focus on the number of animals killed, the weight or the sex of animals killed, the particular species killed, or the smallest or largest body or body part of the animal killed. Contests frequently involve betting and end with a check-in or weigh-in of the animals, followed by a party

where contest prizes are awarded. Afterwards, the carcasses of the animals are usually dumped, away from public view.

Animals not killed may be injured, maimed, and/or dependent young may be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation, or exposure.

These competitive killing events are a bloodsport for entertainment, with participants glorifying kill numbers and showing no respect for wild animals and their habitats.

Each year thousands of coyotes, foxes, bobcats, prairie dogs, crows, and even wolves are targeted in wildlife killing contests.

Such contests masquerade as “management” and “hunting” but instead increase the potential for conflict and violate ethical hunting principles. Nationally, wildlife killing contests are one of the last blood sports that remain legal with dog fighting and cockfighting now relegated to history.

Modern science and societal values point to nonlethal methods as the only way for humans and wildlife to coexist in the face of 21st-century challenges. Wildlife killing contests are antithetical to ethics, science, and coexistence with life in North America.

These killing contests encourage senseless brutality and serve absolutely no scientifically-backed ecological or conservation purpose.

Because participants often wastefully discard targeted wildlife, wildlife killing contests do not embody the hunting principles set forth by the North America Wildlife Conservation Model, which includes a requirement that wildlife only be killed for a legitimate purpose. As a result, numerous State agencies and officials have recognized that these contests can undermine public support for hunting and damage the reputation of sportsmen and sportswomen who abide by traditional hunting ethics.

Tenets of hunting principles are set forth in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation¹ which underpins hunter education courses across the country. Tenet four of the Model states that “[w]ildlife shall be taken by legal and ethical means, in the spirit of ‘fair chase,’ and with good cause. Animals can be killed only for legitimate purposes—for food and fur, in self-defense, or for protection of property.” Killing animals in the hopes of winning cash and prizes, and for entertainment, is not one of the legitimate purposes set forth by the Model.

¹ Today’s Hunter: a guide to hunting responsibly and safely, Kalkomey Enterprises, Inc. at 82 (2015).

Contest participants frequently disregard the principle of “fair chase” as well, with participants using bait, night vision equipment, and electronic calling devices to attract animals with sounds that mimic prey or distress calls of wounded young in an attempt to maximize the chances of winning cash and prizes.

Hunter codes also decry indiscriminate killing and waste, which is a concept that ensures that meat and usable parts are not wasted. In killing contests, the carcasses of the animals are wasted, as the animals are not consumed for meat, and the fur is rendered unusable due to the damaging effects of high-powered weaponry. After weigh-in, carcasses are typically dumped.

Notably, these contests have been banned in an increasing number of states due to growing public concern.

3. Statements from Individuals, State Agencies, and Organizations which Oppose Wildlife Killing Contests:

- In 2018, hunter and Chairman of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Mike Finley condemned wildlife killing contests. He stated that “[k]illing large numbers of predators as part of an organized contest or competition is inconsistent with sound, science-based wildlife management and antithetical to the concepts of sportsmanship and fair chase.”² He also called the contests “slaughter fests” and “stomach-turning examples of wanton waste.”³ “It’s wanton killing,” says Finley, who backed a ban in Oregon while chairing the state’s fish and wildlife commission. “You can’t justify it.”
- Former President of the California Fish and Game Commission and waterfowl hunter Mike Sutton denounced the events as “unethical” and “an anachronism [with] no place in modern wildlife management.”
- The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department stated, “**coyote hunting contests are not only ineffective at controlling coyote populations**, but these kinds of competitive coyote hunts are raising concerns on the part of the public and could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.”
- The Wildlife Society issued a position statement in 2019 recognizing that “while species killed in contests can be legally killed in most states, making a contest of it

² Testimony by Mike Finley to the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee, March 18, 2019. Available at: <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/200547>.

³ Todd Wilkinson, A Death of Ethics: is hunting destroying itself?, Mountain Journal, Dec. 12, 2018. Available at: <https://mountainjournal.org/hunting-in-america-faces-an-ethical-reckoning>.

may undermine the public’s view of ethical hunting” and discouraging “contests that portray hunting in an unethical fashion.”

- Ted Chu, former wildlife manager with Idaho Fish and Game stated: “Hunting is not a contest and it should never be a competitive activity about who can kill the most or the biggest animals.”⁴
- Dan Gibbs, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, said: “For me, hunting contests don’t sit well. As a sportsman, I’d never participate in one personally . . . wildlife killing contests give sportsmen and sportswomen a bad name and damage our reputation.”⁵

4. Prevalence:

These contests occur in many states, such as the Coyote Cup contest in Maine, the Eastern U.S. Predator Challenge in Virginia, the West Texas Big Bobcat Contest, the Coyote Crush in Indiana, etc. They target countless animals, are unmonitored by wildlife agencies, and are legal throughout most of the United States.

Thankfully, there are now a total of ten states which have banned wildlife killing contests - Arizona, California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. Hopefully, we can add Rhode Island to this list in 2025.

Notably, as covered in the October 2024 issue of Rolling Stone magazine⁶ such activities are referred to as wildlife killing contests by opponents while they are referred to as predator hunting contests, derbies, or tournaments by organizers and participants.

The rising popularity of wildlife killing contests has stirred up a culture war among hunters over questions of fair chase and what it means to be an ethical hunter. Some game hunters are even at the forefront of the fight to stop these competitions.

[Here is an excerpt from that Rolling Stone magazine article:](#)

“Numbers vary widely, but Texas is believed to host more contests than any other state (estimates range from 60 to 600 a year; Moyer on the SEO podcast mused the number to be closer to 1,000). Among dozens of others, popular ones include the monthlong Wise County Hog Contest, the Rough Country Big Gray Fox Contest, and The West Texas Big Bobcat Contest, billed as the “highest-paying hunting contest in the country.” Only about

⁴ Todd Wilkinson, Shoot biggest wolf, win trophy and cash, Jackson Hole News & Guide, Dec. 18, 2013. [Shoot biggest wolf, win trophy and cash | Columnists | jhnewsandguide.com](https://www.jhnewsandguide.com/columnists/jhnewsandguide.com)

⁵ Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting, Apr. 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vk7x_gx5PY.

⁶ <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/wildlife-predator-killing-contests-1235128129/>

25 teams participated when it began in 2008, according to co-founder Jeremy Harrison. Now its January, February, and March contests draw almost 2,000 teams and hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize money. This year the contest paid out more than \$421,000 to various winners and has doled out almost \$4 million overall.

The rules for each contest vary, but typically the teams that bring in the heaviest predators win the main money pot. There are often side pots for, say, the most gray fox, bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, squirrels, or other animals classified as “varmints” that don’t have bag limits or hunting seasons. Coyotes, for example, can be killed year-round in most states in the U.S. without limits. Some animals killed at the contests might be sold to fur buyers or taxidermied while others might be discarded. Undercover Humane Society investigators once found coyotes in the dumpster after a New York contest. Randall tells me they bury the animals they don’t use. “Nobody eats foxes or coyotes,” he says.”

Regarding wildlife killing contests scheduled for 2025, there are hundreds throughout the country. I have listed several examples below:

1. The 2025 Coyote Cup Contest in **Maine** (February 8th, 30 teams competed)

[The Coyote Cup – The Predator Hunter Association](#)

2. Nuggets Night Vision 2025 Predator Calling Championship in Illinois

[Tournament Registration](#)

Notably, 405 coyotes were killed during the 2023 event.

3. Dance's Sporting Goods 2025 Predator Hunt Contest in Virginia

[Contests | Dance's Sporting Goods](#)

4. Deerassic Peak 2025 Coyote Tournament in Ohio

[Tournaments | Deerassic Park Education Center](#)

5. 2025 Great Lakes Predator Challenge in Michigan by D&R Sports Center

[Rules - Great Lakes Region Predator Challenge](#)

6. 2025 Coyote Hunts in Pennsylvania by the PA State Hunters Organization, including Possum Hollow Sportsman's Club of PA, OH, and WV,

[Coyote Hunts in pa/ Post local tournaments | Facebook](#)

7. 2025 West Texas Big Bobcat Contest, multiple sponsors

[West Texas Big Bobcat Contest | The highest paying predator hunting contest in the U.S.A.](#)

Examples of previous events:

1. Eastern U.S. Predator Calling Championship in Virginia

[Exposed: Virginia wildlife killing contest where 600 animals were slaughtered in just 2 days | The Humane Society of the United States](#)

Notably, 600 animals were slaughtered in just two days in the 2022 event.

2. Kanawha Valley Predator 2021 Calling Championship in Virginia

[Virginia Wildlife Killing Contests Investigation](#)

Notably 315 coyotes and foxes were killed during the 2021 event.

Here is some video coverage of the outcomes of some such events:

1. Trailer proving summary of what happens at such events:

[Wildlife Killing Contests - Official Trailer](#)

2. Full video of what happens at such contests - quite disturbing:

[Wildlife Killing Contests - FULL MOVIE](#)

Notably, there are now a total of ten states which have banned wildlife killing contests - Arizona, California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.

My goal is to add the State of Rhode Island to that list in 2025.

5. Not an effective wildlife management tool.

Contrary to the claims from proponents, sponsors, and participants, wildlife killing contests are not an effective wildlife management tool. Instead, they undermine modern, science-based wildlife management principles.

Wildlife killing contests are counterproductive to modern, science-based wildlife management principles because they are ineffective. As state wildlife agencies have recognized, and as best available science shows, the indiscriminate killing of wildlife will not prevent conflicts with wildlife, boost populations of game species, or reduce coyote numbers. In fact, killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structure of

animals who are killed. In the case of coyotes, this disruption allows more coyotes to reproduce and can increase conflicts with livestock.

All species, especially top carnivores, play a vital role in healthy ecosystems. Coyotes help to control disease transmission, keep rodent populations in check, increase biodiversity, remove sick animals from the gene pool, and protect crops. By predation on mice and other rodents that harbor disease-carrying ticks, foxes are important for controlling tick-borne diseases such as Lyme.

In regard to coyotes, as conveyed in the Narragansett Bay Coyote Study report, “lethal removal works for individual problem animals but does not work as a population control strategy. Why? Coyotes have intrinsic physiological and behavioral abilities to control their own numbers. Their reproductive rate is regulated by the amount of food competition with other coyotes. If numbers of coyotes are lethally removed those remaining will respond to the decrease in food competition by increasing reproduction. Coyote populations rapidly rebound. As long as coyotes are well fed their populations will grow.”

This is also conveyed by many others who study coyotes, such as Dan Flores in Coyote America. As Dan had stated, “if we actually want fewer of them or want to slow down their saturation of the continent, the obvious solution is to stop killing them (coyotes) and allow their populations to stabilize”.

Notably, donkeys have long been recognized as effective guardians in managing coyote populations. Their innate behaviors and physical abilities make them a natural predator of coyotes, providing a valuable line of defense for livestock and property.⁷ They are territorial animals and will fiercely defend their territory against intruders. They are known for their willingness to stand their ground and fight, particularly against canid threats like coyotes. This is also the case with llamas and alpacas.

In general, the indiscriminate killing promoted by wildlife killing contests is counterproductive to effective wildlife population management. Tenet six of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation states: “[w]ildlife management, use, and conservation shall be based on sound scientific knowledge and principles.”⁸ Scientific studies have shown that many wildlife populations depleted by unnatural means simply reproduce more quickly due to the sudden drop in competition for resources and changes to social structure from the loss of individuals.⁹ This effect is well documented for coyote

⁷ [Can Donkeys Kill Coyotes? The Role Of Donkeys In Coyote Management - CanterCraze](#)

⁸ Today's Hunter: a guide to hunting responsibly and safely, Kalkomey Enterprises, Inc. at 82 (2015).

⁹ F. F. Knowlton, et al., Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management, 52 Journal of Range Management 398, 400-402 (1999). Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/43f7/3adf647447dd472db69c0b4712f1c71fab33.pdf>; Robert Crabtree and

populations in particular, which are the species most commonly targeted by wildlife killing contest participants in New Hampshire. The indiscriminate killing of coyotes increases their populations over time because it disrupts their social structure, which encourages higher levels of breeding and migration.¹⁰ This negatively impacts the environment because coyotes are an integral part of healthy ecosystems.¹¹ Coyotes help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, consume carrion, remove sick animals from the gene pool, disperse seeds, protect ground-nesting birds from smaller carnivores, and increase the biological diversity of plant and wildlife communities.¹²

State wildlife management agencies across the country have recognized that killing contests do not control coyote population size. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation stated: “random removal of coyotes resulting from a year-round hunting season will not . . . control or reduce coyote populations.”¹³ The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife stated: “hunting [would not] have an appreciable impact on coyote population size under any realistic scenarios.”¹⁴ The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department made a similar finding, stating: “we do not believe such short-term hunts will have any measurable impact on regulating coyote populations” because

Jennifer Sheldon, Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone, in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience* (T. Clark et al., eds, 1999); J. M. Goodrich and S. W. Buskirk, Control of Abundant Native Vertebrates for Conservation of Endangered Species, 9 *Conservation Biology* (1995); Elizabeth Kierepka, et al., Effect of Compensatory Immigration on the Genetic Structure of Coyotes, 81 *J. Wildlife Mgmt* 1394, 1394 (2017). Available at: https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/2018/ja_2018_kilgo_002.pdf.

¹⁰ Id.; see also S.D. Gehrt, Chicago Coyotes part II, 11 *Wildlife Control Technologies* 20-21, 38-9, 42 (2004).

¹¹ Fox, C.H. and C.M. Papouchis, Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore 9 (2005). Available at: http://www.projectcoyote.com/Coyotes_In_Our_Midst.pdf.

¹² S. E. Henke and F. C. Bryant, Effects of Coyote Removal on the Faunal Community in Western Texas, 63 *Journal of Wildlife Management* 1066 (1999); K. R. Crooks and M. E. Soule, Mesopredator Release and Avifaunal Extinctions in a Fragmented System, 400 *Nature* 563 (1999); E. T. Mezquida, et al., Sage-Grouse and Indirect Interactions: Potential Implications of Coyote Control on Sage-Grouse Populations, 108 *Condor* 747 (2006). Available at: http://repository.uwyo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=zooology_facpub; N. M. Waser et al., Coyotes, Deer, and Wildflowers: Diverse Evidence Points to a Trophic Cascade, 101 *Naturwissenschaften* 427 (2014).

¹³ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, *The Status and Impact of Eastern Coyotes in Northern New York* (1991). Available at: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/coystatnny91.pdf.

¹⁴ Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, Public Hearing Notice on Draft Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Regulations at 321 CMR 2.00 and 3.02. (Sept. 20, 2019). Available at https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/09/20/DFW_DRAFT_321%20CMR%202.26%2C2.17%2C3.02%20-%20PHN%2C%20Summary%2C%20and%20Proposed%20Regulations.pdf.

“when coyote populations are exploited, productivity and pup survival increases.”¹⁵ The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission concluded, after reviewing a large body of scientific and peer-reviewed literature, that indiscriminate, lethal methods of controlling coyotes, such as bounties and harvest incentive programs, are ineffective and counterproductive, that coyotes provide benefits to humans and ecosystems, and that non-lethal measures are the best way to address conflicts with coyotes.¹⁶

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission found: “[r]emoving coyotes for the purpose of eradication is an inefficient and ineffective method to control populations . . . hunting and trapping place pressure on coyote populations, and the species responds by reproducing at a younger age and producing more pups per litter.”¹⁷

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (“WDFW”) has stated: “[d]espite . . . past efforts to eliminate coyotes, the species maintains its numbers and is increasing in some areas.”¹⁸ WDFW has also found that “it’s neither necessary nor possible to eliminate the entire population of coyotes in a given area.”¹⁹

Many other state wildlife management agencies, including the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, as well as departments in Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming, have reached similar conclusions.²⁰

¹⁵ Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dep’t, Vermont Coyote Population Report 9 (2018). Available at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Hunt/trapping/Vermont%20Coyote%20Population%20Report%20to%20Legislature-2018.pdf>.

¹⁶ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Coyote Management Plan 11, 21-28 (2018). Available at: https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Species/Coyote%20Management%20Plan_FINAL_030118.pdf.

¹⁷ Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Coyotes: Living with Coyotes. Available at: <https://myfwc.com/conservation/you- conserve/wildlife/coyotes/>.

¹⁸ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Coyotes. Available at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species/habitats/species/canis-latrans#conflict>.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, Coyote. Available at: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/wildlife/Pages/Coyote.aspx>; Kentucky Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Resources, Coyotes in the Suburbs. Available at: <https://fw.ky.gov/Wildlife/Documents/KAspring17coyotes.pdf>; Travis Dufour, Living with Coyotes, Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries Wildlife Division - Private Lands Program. Available at: http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/publication/34726-living-coyotes-low-res/living_with_coyotes_low-res.pdf;

Bill White, The Bounty Hunter, Missouri Dept. of Conservation (Aug. 21, 2012). Available at: <https://mdc.mo.gov/blogs/more-quail/bounty-hunter>; New Hampshire Fish and Game, Eastern Coyote. Available at: <https://wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/profiles/coyote.html>; Nevada Dept. of Wildlife, Coyote. Available at: <http://www.ndow.org/Species/Furbearer/Coyote/>; National Wildlife Control Training Program, Coyotes. Available at: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/publications/nuisance/coyotes.pdf>;

6. Why is this bill needed in RI?

While there is no evidence of such contests presently occurring in RI, until as recently as 2019 wildlife killing contests were allowed and occurred in our neighboring state of Massachusetts; the target there was coyotes. Additionally, as recently as February of this year, a predator hunting contest was held in Maine and such contests are still legal in our neighboring state of New Hampshire.

Notably, as a follow-up to a comment which I received last year on this topic in which it was suspected that there might already be a law or regulation prohibiting this activity in RI, I contacted the RI DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife on this topic. The response which I received is as follows - "the supervising biologist here at RI DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife stated that he does not know of any regulation or statute that prohibits hunting contests, tournaments, or matches". Additionally, in communication which I received from the RI DEM Director of Legislative Affairs it was stated that – "DEM regulations do not speak to wildlife killing contests as defined in the draft legislation which I shared with them".

Since there are presently no daily nor seasonal bag limits on coyotes, nor raccoons in R.I., and there are also no daily bag limits for red fox nor gray fox, although there are specified seasons, a wildlife killing contest could occur for any of them at any time, or at least during the respective season. Starting in 2026, this would also include woodchucks, based on the proposed RI Hunting and Trapping Regulations for 2026 – 2027.

Therefore, this bill is a preventative measure, to prevent the unnecessary and, as far as I and many others are concerned, unacceptable and unconscionable slaughter and waste of animals due to either a misconception of the impact or "benefit" of such and/or the thrill of earning a prize or monetary reward for such.

Why wait until such an event, and the corresponding slaughter associated with it occurs, before enacting such legislation?

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Controlling Coyotes in Tennessee (Jan. 2003). Available at: <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/twra/documents/coyotecontrol.pdf>; Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Living with Wildlife. Available at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/coyotes.html>; West Virginia Dept. of Natural Resources, Eastern Coyote Impacts Of The Eastern Coyote On Wildlife Populations. Available at: <http://www.wvdnr.gov/hunting/CoyoteResearch.shtm>; Dave Rippe, Predator Control and Wildlife, Wyoming Game and Fish Dept., Habitat Extension Bulletin: No. 57 (July 1995). Available at: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/WGFD/media/content/PDF/Habitat/Extension%20Bulletins/B57-Predator-Control-and-Wildlife.pdf>.

In summary, Rhode Island should join other states in banning wildlife killing contests because these events:

- (1) are cruel and violate fundamental hunting principles, which damages the reputation of Rhode Island's sportsmen and sportswomen;
- (2) undermine modern, science-based wildlife management principles and are not an effective wildlife management tool;
- (3) do not increase populations of game animals; and
- (4) do not prevent conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock—and instead may increase them.

7. What are the concerns for this bill in Rhode Island?

I have been informed by a Representative of the concern that the draft bill might impact “big buck” hunting contests. Additionally, I have been informed by the RI DEM Director of Legislative Affairs that they were concerned that the language of the draft bill could potentially impact fishing tournaments in the state which are very popular with anglers.

To address these concerns, the language in the bill has been modified such that it is restricted to furbearers, as defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 20-16-1, which was just updated last year. The specific regulation covering furbearers is now 250-RICR-60-00-13.

In summary, I urge you to vote in favor of S 864 so that we can prevent what is currently allowed in RI – the slaughter and wanton waste of certain furbearers for no scientifically based purpose, but instead for entertainment, cash, prizes, or other inducements.

Sincerely,

David A. Brunetti
Burrillville, RI 02830