Animal Protection Groups Stop Coyote Killing Contest

BEND, Oregon – The national nonprofit Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), along with co-plaintiffs Project Coyote and an individual Oregon resident, settled a lawsuit against Duane Freilino, organizer of the annual JMK Coyote Hunting Contest in Crane, Harney County, Oregon. Freilino’s killing contest, held annually for eight seasons, required hunters to “buy in” to the contest by paying an entry fee of $100. Top teams won cash prizes totalling more than $10,000 for various kills, including “most kills” and “largest kill.”
According to ALDF’s lawsuit, which was filed with Project Coyote this past January, the killing contest and associated betting competition constituted a gambling enterprise, which is illegal and deemed a public nuisance in the state of Oregon, where under state law a court may stop illegal gambling events. In response to the lawsuit, Freilino had filed a counterclaim for $100,000. Arguing the counter-suit was an attempt at intimidation, the groups filed a motion to dismiss the counter-suit, leading Freilino to drop his meritless claim and settle the lawsuit against him by agreeing never to host another hunting contest in Oregon and to pay $5,252 in attorney fees to the animal groups.

Previous JMK events resulted in the killing of nearly 150 coyotes. Under Oregon wildlife laws, there is no bag limit or restriction on the killing of coyotes. Animal and environmental groups have long expressed concern about the risk to habitat and wildlife posed by killing contests and countered the claims made that such killing contests provide an effective wildlife management tool. The Oregon branch of the Federal Bureau of Land Management has previously denied Mr. Freilino a special use permit for the killing contest, which took place on public land.

“Most people are shocked to learn that it is legal to kill coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and other wildlife as part of a contest or tournament for prizes and ‘recreational fun’,” said Camilla Fox, founder and executive director of Project Coyote. “They’re even more shocked to learn that hundreds of such contests take place each year in the U.S. killing thousands of wild animals.” Project Coyote is currently leading an effort to ban wildlife-killing contests in California.

“The mass killing of coyotes and other native wildlife during killing contests is cruel and environmentally destructive,” said Stephen Wells, executive director of the Animal Legal Defense Fund. “Coyotes are indiscriminately blown apart by bullets for profit and ALDF is glad that now hundreds of coyotes can live a peaceful life in the precious ecosystems of Oregon’s wilderness.”

Copies of the complaint are available upon request.

ALDF was founded in 1979 with the unique mission of protecting the lives and advancing the interests of animals through the legal system. For more information, please visit aldf.org.

Project Coyote is a North America coalition of wildlife educators, scientists, predator friendly ranchers, and community leaders promoting coexistence between people and wildlife, and compassionate conservation through education, science, and advocacy.

For more information, please visit ProjectCoyote.org.