Ban on Wildlife Killing Contests Moves Forward

Last week’s California Fish and Game Commission got a lot of press attention for the Commission’s decision to add the gray wolf to the state’s Endangered Species list, but another decision by the panel has so far slipped under the radar: an agreement to move forward on a ban on wildlife-killing contests in the state of California.

A push to ban such contests has been sparked by public reaction over the last several years to the annual Coyote Drive in the Modoc County town of Adin. Public support for a ban would seem to be strong. Of public comments received as of mid-March by the Fish and Game Commission, 12,896 supported a ban, while eight opposed one. The ban has been moving through the commission’s somewhat lengthy rule-making process since February, but a Wednesday agreement by the commission would make sure the ban applied to all animals currently targeted by organizers of wildlife killing contests.
At some earlier point in the commission’s “sausage-making,” the language of the proposed ban was edited so that it would only ban killing contests focusing on coyotes, bobcats, and foxes. On Wednesday, the Commission agreed to strip that specific language out in the final version of the rule.

According to Project Coyote who has been pushing the commission to consider a ban for several years, founder Camilla Fox, that agreement brings the proposed rule back into line with the original intent of the state law that covers wildlife contests. That law, Section 2003 of the Fish and Game Code, actually already bans wildlife killing contests in the state, saying that “[t] It is unlawful to offer any prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of any game birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, or amphibians in an individual contest, tournament, or derby.” But the rule adds a loophole, subsection D, which exempts contests from the ban if the total prizes offered total less than $500.

“This loophole contravenes the intent of section 2003 which is to eliminate any prize or other inducement as a reward for the taking of wildlife,” said Fox in her testimony before the Commission Wednesday. “A simple rule to eliminate this loophole will rectify this issue and remove such incentives for the mass killing of wildlife.”

Fox urged the Commission to strip the language limiting the ban to coyotes, foxes, and bobcats from the proposed rule, and the commission agreed.

“Killing contests are not a proper way of introducing youth to the outdoors,” replied Commissioner Richard Rogers. “I know, for I am an Eagle Scout. There was no killing involved in developing in me my love of nature.”

The commission is expected to make a final decision on a ban later this year.