Critics of coyote hunting contests hope to ban the controversial practice in Nevada, insisting it amounts to little more than wanton slaughter of wildlife.

Hunters counter that it is a legally protected sport that may help keep in check a soaring coyote population increasingly posing threats to livestock, pets and people.

Don Molde of Reno and Fred Voltz of Carson City have petitioned the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners for regulatory changes that would outlaw contests awarding cash or other prizes for killing coyotes.

The proposal, scheduled to be discussed by commissioners in March, comes as state lawmakers discuss similar action in New Mexico and two months after California enacted a first-of-its-kind ban on coyote hunting contests.

Molde, of Nevadans for Responsible Wildlife Management, moved to change Nevada regulations after a “coyote calling contest” was conducted in the
North Valleys outside Reno in December, generating controversy and drawing national media attention.

“Somebody has to do something. These contests are outrageous,” Molde said. “It is the willful killing of wildlife just for the fun of it. It’s just not right.”

Across the West, the coyote is classified as an unprotected animal. They can be hunted without a license or permit, shot on sight, and there’s no limit on the number that can be killed at one time.

In coyote calling contests, coyotes are typically lured with devices that mimic the howls and yips of coyotes or the sounds of prey animals such as rabbits or rodents. Prizes are awarded based on number of kills.

Last December’s coyote call in the North Valleys was a small affair, with only 10 coyotes killed, according to organizers. Others are huge. During the 2013 World Coyote Calling Championship in Elko, 110 two-person hunting teams killed more than 300 coyotes.

Jason Schroeder, a heavy equipment mechanic who organized December’s contest, called controversy over the event unjustified and predicted efforts to ban such contests in Nevada will “never fly.”

“They are entitled to their opinion, and we’re entitled to ours,” Schroeder said. “The law says you can hunt coyotes on public land and that’s what we’ve done.”

Coyotes clearly pose a mounting problem, Schroeder said, adding that three dens of coyotes are now living on his Lemmon Valley property.

“Coyotes are moving out of the wild and into town,” he said. “Coyotes are biting people right now. They are attacking people’s animals.”

But hunting contests are not an effective method of controlling coyote populations, said Camille Fox, executive director of Project Coyote, the organization that successfully petitioned the California Fish and Game Commission to ban coyote hunting contests. California law still allows hunters to shoot as many of the predators as they wish year-round but outlaws the awarding of prizes.

Fox points to studies indicating that coyote hunts have only short-lived effectiveness at best in controlling coyote populations due to the animal’s natural resiliency. Other non-lethal steps can protect livestock and other animals from coyotes, including better fencing and use of guard dogs, she said.

Hunt contests should be outlawed simply as a matter of decency, Fox said.

“Like dogfighting and cockfighting, killing contests are an archaic tradition that really should be left to the history books,” Fox said. “We’re increasingly seeing a backlash against these contests. I do think the American public is fairly outraged by this practice.”

Rick Gipson, who shot his first coyote at age 6, is observing the debate unfold from his home in Boise, Idaho. Gipson has participated in numerous coyote hunting contests over the years, including three world championships like the one held in Elko in 2013.

“The contests are getting larger and the take is getting larger but it’s not getting close to controlling them,” Gipson said, adding that the contests account for a only small percentage of coyotes being killed.

Coyotes are trapped, poisoned and shot from the air by government hunters, yet numbers continue to grow, Gipson said.

“These animals have survived persecution for 200 years and they’ve flourished,” Gipson said. “We’ve been doing this for decades and we’re not even coming close to slowing them down. They just keep coming.”

The successful ban in California and proposals now being discussed in Nevada and New Mexico are bound to be followed by other states, said Gipson, describing the effort as part of a larger anti-hunting agenda.

“They’re going to try it in every Western state,” he said. “These anti-hunters will stop at nothing.”

Fox acknowledges the proposed ban will likely face steep opposition in Nevada.

“It’s not going to be an easy process there,” she said.

Maybe so, said Molde, who said he wants the discussion to occur in any case.

“This board of wildlife commissioners is not going to get into this unless they are forced to,” Molde said. “Either way, we get them on the record.”

COYOTE CONTEST BAN PROPOSAL
WHAT: Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners.
WHEN: 8:30 a.m. March 20.
WHERE: Sierra Building, Room 198, Truckee Meadows Community College, 7000 Dandini, Blvd., Reno.