

# San Francisco Chronicle

By Peter Fimrite

Published: December 5, 2014

From SFGate

(<http://tinyurl.com/ooc57ak>)

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*In this Feb. 10, 2013, file photo, A coyote stands in a field in this undated file photo. Hunters are tromping through the countryside of a remote Northern California county, as they compete in a controversial contest to see who can kill the most coyotes. Organized coyote hunts that award prizes to the top marksman have sparked a culture clash in California between wildlife advocates who value the animals as an essential part of the landscape and people who view coyotes as wily varmints to be hunted down to protect livestock. On Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2014, the California Fish and Game Commission will consider banning prize hunts for coyotes as well as foxes and bobcats, which also are legal to kill year-round in unlimited numbers. © Karen Nichols Associated Press*

## California bans wildlife-killing contests

The California Fish and Game Commission has banned predator killing contests, ending a fierce debate over the rural tradition.

The commission's 4-1 vote Wednesday marks the first prohibition in the country against the practice of giving out prizes for gunning down coyotes and other predators, which wildlife advocates say happens almost every month in California and nearby states.

"This ruling sets a trend for the nation," said Camilla Fox, executive director of Project Coyote, which petitioned the state to end the contests. "Our hope is that other states will follow suit and ban wildlife

killing contests. Such barbaric cruelty should not be accepted or tolerated in the 21st century or in a nation that has banned such practices as dog fighting and cock fighting."

The ruling makes it illegal to offer a prize, inducement or reward for killing predators, including coyotes, foxes and bobcats. It does not, however, prevent hunters from simply shooting the predators on sight. Fox said she and other wildlife conservation groups now plan to push the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop rules limiting the hunting of predators and shifting the focus from management to stewardship.

**ProjectCoyote.org**

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## ***“As ranchers who know that livestock and wildlife can coexist, we feel it’s important to do what we can to help end this unnecessary war on wildlife,”***

*Keli Hendricks/Project Coyote*

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“An overall comprehensive review of the state’s predator policies, regulations and statutes has not been done,” Fox said.

“That’s what we are pushing for. Our hope is that this ruling also starts a comprehensive review and reform process of California’s predator policies, regulations and statutes.”

The campaign began after conservationists got wind of a three-day Coyote Drive held each February in the woodlands around the rural town of Adin (Modoc County), in the far northeastern corner of California. This came just as a migrating wolf known as OR7 was making his way through California. Wolves are often mistaken for coyotes.

Another impetus was the accidental wounding of a game warden during an El Dorado County coyote and fox hunt.

The furor prompted the federal Bureau of Land Management last week to rescind a

permit that wildlife conservationists said would have allowed a hunting club to hold a “predator derby” and kill a multitude of wild animals — including wolves — on more than 300 million acres of BLM lands in Idaho.

Wildlife conservationists argue that predator killing contests, particularly coyote roundups, are counterproductive. Studies have shown that coyotes breed more often and have more pups when pack leaders are killed. That’s because the leaders, or alphas, in a coyote pack are the only animals that mate. When the alpha is killed, previously celibate underlings can mate, and the population then grows exponentially.

Ranchers say they need to manage coyotes because the wily canines are responsible for the vast majority of livestock deaths. There are as many as 700,000 coyotes in the state, according to the California

Cattlemen’s Association, which contends they are a serious threat to livestock, which are commodities that contribute to the state and local economy.

Hunting and fishing tags and license fees contribute between \$80 million to \$100 million a year to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, roughly a quarter of the annual budget, according to hunting groups. But not all ranchers support the indiscriminate killing of predators for fun and sport.

“As ranchers who know that livestock and wildlife can coexist, we feel it’s important to do what we can to help end this unnecessary war on wildlife,” said Keli Hendricks, a Petaluma rancher who is on the advisory board of Project Coyote. “It angers us when these contests are promoted as a way to help ranchers protect their livestock. The reality is, there is no noble purpose behind a killing contest.”

