

PRESS RELEASE

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Wildlife advocates condemn Challis coyote killing "tournament"

Wildlife advocates are condemning an upcoming coyote killing "tournament", scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 21, and sponsored by the Bent Rod Outdoors, a Challis business.

"This event has no place in the 21st Century", said Brian Ertz, a Hailey resident, and president of Wildlife Watchers, a group that says wildlife viewing, rather than killing, is preferred by the majority of Idahoans. "We are urging concerned citizens to contact the Bent Rod Outdoors (208.879.2500), and also the Challis Chamber of Commerce (208.879.2771) to protest this day-long coyote slaughter."

The coyote "tournament" was publicized through ads in the Challis Messenger on Feb. 12 and 18. When contacted, a Bent Rod employee stated that there would be prizes including cash for the most coyotes killed, the largest and smallest coyotes, and other categories. Coyote killers would enter the Bent Rod's "tournament" by paying \$25 per person, or \$50 for a two-person team. The "contest" starts Saturday morning and ends that evening at Bent Rod Outdoors.

"Coyote contest hunts are ecologically unsound and ethically indefensible," states Camilla Fox, Founding Director of Project Coyote and Wildlife Consultant with the Animal Welfare Institute. "Such hunts do nothing to reduce coyote populations or conflicts and if anything may serve to increase regional coyote populations."

Ertz adds: "There's no fair chase in trapping or calling in coyotes and nobody's feeding their family with coyote meat. This is a blatant example of animal cruelty, indecency and shows a total lack of respect for life. I'm surprised and disappointed that a business would host an event that celebrates the needless pain and suffering of an animal that's been called "God's Dog."*

"Coyote killing contests are brutal and foster antipathy toward coyotes, degrading them to vermin status, which is antithetical to conservation biology and ecosystem-based science." said Fox.

The groups say that while coyotes will prey on larger mammals, their diet consists mainly of small mammals including mice, voles, rats, ground squirrels and rabbits-- providing free rodent control services to ranchers. The coalition also points out that progressive cattle and sheep ranchers are living with coyotes using non-lethal methods.

Much like wolves, generally, unexploited coyotes may live in social family groups, with only the alpha pair breeding once a year in mid-February and giving birth 63 days later. Other females, though physiologically capable of reproducing, are "behaviorally sterile." Coyotes respond to lethal control with a number of biological mechanisms, which can result in increased litter size.

In a coyote "contest", so-called hunters slaughter coyotes using various techniques to attract the coyote into rifle range. This may include using leg hold traps that only have to be checked every 72 hours in Idaho, or a distress call that sounds like an injured animal. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear a cry for help, may come to investigate.

Coyote hunters have also been known to bait in coyotes for "sport" shooting, using livestock that have died from old age, illness, or injury.

The wildlife groups protesting the coyote "tournament" include the Project Coyote, Wildlife Watchers, Boulder-White Clouds Council, Animal Welfare Institute, Big Wildlife, Footloose Montana, Dr. Tom Huhnerkoch/Mountain Cats Trust, Western Watersheds Project, and numerous individuals.

Coyotes have no protection whatsoever under current Idaho law. Coyotes can be run over with a vehicle, including being chased to exhaustion and run over with a snowmobile. When this happened in the Sawtooth Valley several years ago, a photo of the flattened coyote received widespread negative press for the sport of snow-machining.

The wildlife groups protesting the Challis hunt say they have contacted law enforcement officials in the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM to make them aware of the coyote killing event planned by the Bent Rod, and urged extra patrols so that the common (though illegal) practice of shooting coyotes off highways and back roads does not occur.

*"God's Dog" was written by biologist Hope Ryden, published in 1989 by Lyons Press, and is an account of her studies of coyotes in the American West.

Below: A coyote paws through deep snow after feeding on a road-killed elk near Stanley, Idaho, Feb. 2008. Photo by Lynne K. Stone, BWCC, Copyright 2008.

