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Blood sport

Coyote-killing contest will be held near Dane County this weekend

BY JOE TARR JANUARY 17, 2019



A still from an investigation by the Humane Society of the United States of a wildlife killing contest in Macedon, New York, in January 2018.

On her 40 acres of land near Baraboo, Mikii Opahle can usually hear coyotes howling on summer nights.

“It’s amazing. We’re among natural wild animals, they’re sharing this space with us. It adds a whole other dimension to our lives,” she says. “We used to think there’s got to be 10 or 12 out there, but I’ve learned that because of the way they howl, two coyotes can sound like eight.”

She was horrified to learn that there’s an annual contest to kill the animals, this year held in nearby Sauk City, where her kids go to school. “It kind of hit home for me. It really prompted me to take action right away.”

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contests in Wisconsin. The contest in Sauk City, which takes place from Jan. 18 to 20, is the second of three hunts in Moondog Madness, which bills itself as the state's "biggest coyote tournament."

In the event, teams of two hunters compete to see who can kill the most coyotes using calls (dogs and baiting are not allowed). Ties are settled by the combined weight of the animals. The entrance fee is \$100, with options to pay an extra \$20 for two side contests for biggest and smallest animal killed.

Winners get cash and other prizes, such as lights for night hunting, hats, T-shirts, animal calls, art work and lines for dragging game. About 20 percent of the entrance fees are donated to **Shot for Hope**, which helps children with life-threatening illnesses or disabilities "go on a hunt of their dreams."

Killing contests take place around the country, some targeting large predators, others smaller game like rabbits, prairie dogs or crows. An organizer for Moondog Madness did not respond to a Facebook message seeking comment.

Each leg of the tournament begins on Friday evening at 6 and ends Sunday at 2 p.m., when the participants bring their kills in to be weighed.

According to the event's Facebook page, in the first leg of the 2019 Wisconsin tournament, held in Sparta, **16 teams of hunters killed a combined 71 coyotes**. The winning team killed 11 animals with a combined weight of 321 pounds.

The final leg of the tournament will be held Feb. 1 to 3 in Cambria.

Melissa Tedrowe, Midwest region director of the Humane Society, says that while her group actively opposes the contests, it discourages protesting in person to avoid violent confrontation. Instead, it is asking people to write to legislators and newspapers, calling for a ban.

Adrian Treves, a UW-Madison professor who runs the **Carnivore Coexistence Lab**, says it's difficult to say what effect these contests are having on coyote populations, because the state isn't regulating them.

However, they have the potential to be devastating. "We suspect the worst — that a whole region is getting depleted of coyotes, as in a whole county area or broader."

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this perception that they’re everywhere and numerous,” he says. “But the reality is much more likely that they range widely and people are seeing the same individuals, even when they’re a couple of neighborhoods apart.”

Treves says the state’s Department of Natural Resources has the ability and duty to stop these contests under the “public trust doctrine,” which holds that natural resources need to be preserved for future generations.

“It’s also in statute that wildlife are a public trust resource,” he says. “What a public trust resource means is some private individual can’t take as much as they want, as these contests are effectively doing.”

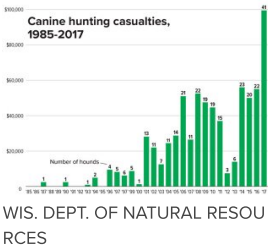
Editor’s note: The photo accompanying this story was originally misattributed to the documentary Killing Games: Wildlife in the Crosshairs. It is a still from an investigation by the Humane Society of the United States of a wildlife killing contest in Macedon, New York, in January 2018.

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