

I am testifying today in opposition to HB 2728.

Lake County spans an area of over 8,000 square miles, with less than 8,000 people. Truly a Frontier County. Many of our resident families have resided in Lake County for generations, and therefore have a tremendous love and respect for the rural culture, and a close connection to nature that can be achieved in a County of our size and beauty.

My family moved here in 1977, where we decided to raise sheep and cows. We learned from our neighbors how to treat the land, how to sow a crop, and to not only love the environment, but to respect it, along with the animals that depend on it. The grass that grows on our land is from the same seed and root stock that grew on those meadows more than 200 years ago.

You may be asking how this is relevant... I tell this story to share my understanding of an equilibrium that HB 2728 would disrupt.

Coyotes have been part of our culture and history, they serve a purpose, but they are also dangerous and can be very destructive if left unchecked. Every farmer knows that coyotes can be an asset to managing rodents and pests that invade their crops. You can't drive through Lake County and not see a Coyote. In a field mousing, or crossing a road. There is a majestic beauty to the land, and Coyotes have their place in it. Most farmers in Lake County also manage livestock, which gives them a balanced perspective. A perspective I hope to share.

Over the years, Coyote derby's have been a way for our local residents to keep the population in check. A way of being responsibly proactive rather than emotionally reactive once things get out of control. I have personally lost young newborn lambs and pregnant Ewes (mother sheep) to hungry coyotes because the jack rabbits were gone, caused by overpopulation among the coyotes.

We've lost dogs, cats, sheep and cows to coyotes and other predators. Coyotes don't typically take on a full-grown Cow, but when she's down, and giving birth, they will approach and kill the calf during birth or while it is still unable to stand. The mother will eventually leave and they will return and have their meal.

I will forgo the gruesome details, or as to what this looks like for our farmers and ranchers. It's not uncommon to lose countless animals to coyotes in one year, simply by not managing and having no derby or hunters come in. It is very common to stay up countless hours for endless nights in the barn nursing one lamb, or bringing it in by the fire to keep it alive. There is no return on that investment.

Some may say, "but you sell these animals for profit or food, you don't care!" ...No, it's a way of life. It is a world that few understand, but the culture and people should be respected the same as nature itself.

Although I understand the premise of HB 2728, rather than painting with a broad brush over our state. I would ask for a broader perspective of mutual respect and understanding for our rural neighbors.

I respectfully ask and hope this committee will oppose HB 2728.

Thank you for the time today.

Regards,
James Williams
Lake County Commissioner