

Testimony on HB 2728

February 11, 2021

My name is A. Grant Gunderson. I am a resident of Harney County. I was born in Burns and graduated from Burns High School. My roots in Burns/Harney county are deep. My Great-great was the first person buried in the Burns Cemetery in 1879. I grew up hunting and fishing in Harney County including calling and shooting coyotes. My family has a ranching background. My son is a fifth generation rancher.

My career was that of a wildlife biologist. Early in my career I worked for the Bureau of Land Management in Colorado and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Louisiana. I began working for the USDA Forest Service in 1980 and was stationed in Burns. From 1990 to 1999, I was the Regional Threatened and Endangered Species Program Manager for the Pacific Northwest Region of the USDA Forest Service which, includes all the National Forests in Oregon and Washington. From 1999 until my retirement in 2004, I was the Wildlife Program Manager also for the Pacific Northwest Region.

I am testifying in opposition to HB 2728. My reasoning is as follows:

- 1) Coyotes have been trapped, poisoned, shot, snared, and aerial gunned for decades—has the population been reduced or had an overall decline—absolutely not! In fact, coyotes have expanded their range. In the 1700s, when Europeans first explored North America, they were found primarily on the great plains and east of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada's. The range expansion now includes the entire continental United States including parts of Alaska. They are found in all habitats including large urban areas where they exist on human produced garbage, rats, mice, and pets. There has never been a concern that the coyote population is decreasing.
- 2) Opponents of coyote derbies often express concerns that such derbies undermine the natural population mechanisms that have controlled wildlife populations for centuries. They believe that, if left to themselves, predator and prey would undergo fluctuations in numbers but, through time balances would be achieved. Such reasoning fails to account for human presence in the ecosystems. Natural balance is largely an unreasonable objective. It seems humans are here to stay and oppose having the large natural predators of coyotes in significant numbers. Most of the natural predators of coyotes have been extirpated in their ranges or severely reduced in numbers. The grey wolf is a prime example. In Yellowstone National Park, coyote numbers have plummeted following the reintroduction of wolves. The scarcity or lack of natural coyote predators has accounted for much of the coyote's huge range expansion. Humans are the one

significant predator still existing throughout much of its range. And I would argue that we humans are part of the natural ecosystems.

- 3) Localized reduction in coyote populations from hunting, trapping, and aerial gunning is possible. However, fecundity i.e., more pups/litter when populations are lower, and immigrations quickly replenish that population.
- 4) These, even though temporary, reductions in coyote populations can significantly reduce predation on livestock and wildlife. One study done by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in the mid-1980s concluded that coyote predation was a significant factor in poor Pronghorn fawn survival—a concern throughout SE Oregon at that time. An extensive coyote control program was instituted following that study and Pronghorn fawn survival rates improved.
- 5) It is my conclusion that a ban on coyote derbies has no biological basis. They likely can in fact, temporally reduce coyote populations, thereby increasing calf, lamb, and wildlife fawn survival rates. The population of coyotes will quickly rebound. Concerns about being overrun by mice and other small coyote prey species seems largely unfounded because they do repopulate so quickly. Because of biological facts, I can only surmise that HB 2728 is based purely on emotion. Such emotions should not be the basis of sound biological policy. And they surely should not be the basis of compelling people with a different culture to stop a particular practice.

*Alan Grant Gunderson*

/S/ Alan Grant Gunderson

Retired Wildlife Biologist