

**Southwest Environmental Center • Sierra Club: Rio Grande Chapter
WildEarth Guardians • Sandia Mountain BearWatch • Center for Biological Diversity
Conservation Voters New Mexico • New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
Project Coyote • Rewilding Institute**

February 5, 2014

By email to james.ross@state.nm.us

Susana Martinez, Governor
Office of the Governor
490 Old Santa Fe Trail Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Governor Martinez:

We the undersigned represent organizations with tens of thousands of members in New Mexico who have a strong interest in the conservation of New Mexico's wildlife. We are writing to express our disgust and disappointment in learning that two members of the New Mexico Game Commission ("Commission"), Chairman Scott Bidegain and Commissioner Robert Espinosa, have respectively competed in and organized coyote-killing contests.

Their participation in this type of event reflects a callous disrespect for wildlife, as well as an inexcusable ignorance or perhaps willful disregard for the important scientifically-established role predators such as coyotes play in natural ecosystems, and a profound lack of judgment for officials entrusted with the stewardship of New Mexico's extraordinary wildlife. Their actions indicate an extreme view of wildlife killing which has no place on the Game Commission whose members are supposed to represent all New Mexicans. We urge you to remove them from their positions immediately.

Wildlife is very important to New Mexico's citizens and our state economy. Non-consumptive users of wildlife--who comprise 31 percent of the state's population and outnumber hunters and anglers by nearly two to one--account for \$328 million in annual expenditures related to wildlife-watching.¹ Alienating this segment of the wildlife recreating public carries the risk of harming conservation efforts on which the future of hunting and fishing also depends. Furthermore, many hunters understand and appreciate the role of predators in maintaining the balance of nature, and respect coyotes too much to relegate them to a body count.

The Commission has oversight over 52 percent of the state's more than 1100 vertebrate species², and through its actions has an indirect influence on a much larger portion of New Mexico's biodiversity, certainly far more than just the species taken by anglers, hunters and trappers.

Coyotes should not be treated as vermin to be killed for fun and prizes. As predators, coyotes help to keep prey populations in check, including rodents that carry human diseases such as hantavirus and plague.

Many New Mexicans view wildlife killing contests as barbaric, debasing and cruel, as evidenced by the outpouring of public opinion in opposition to events held in Los Lunas, Las Cruces and elsewhere over the past year.

¹ 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation: State Overview

² New Mexico Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

These types of events serve no legitimate management purpose. Proponents like to say they are needed to keep coyote numbers in check, but in fact, an abundance of research shows that the opposite is true. Because they are territorial, coyotes regulate their own numbers.³ When resident coyotes are removed, others quickly take their place.

Unregulated coyote hunting does not usually have a long-term impact on coyote numbers, because the ability of this species to compensate for losses is prodigious. Thus killing coyotes does not limit their population and hence it does not reduce predation. Killing coyotes does disrupt pack family structure and causes needless suffering to individual animals, not just to those that are actually killed or wounded, but to those that are left orphaned and unable to fend for themselves.

Wildlife killing contests give ethical hunters a bad name. Using animals for live target practice violates one of the core tenets of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation: wildlife should only be killed for a legitimate purpose. Most New Mexicans would agree that killing for fun and cash prizes is not a legitimate purpose, and in fact is morally reprehensible. By this violation, these two game commissioners show their disrespect for conservation and disregard for the public trust with which they have been bestowed.

In recent years, the Commission has come under fire from sportsmen and conservationists alike for catering to narrow special interests. By their actions, Commissioners Bidegain and Espinosa have demonstrated they not only do not care what most New Mexicans think, but they see no need to maintain even an *appearance* of caring. In doing so, they have further damaged the credibility of the Game Commission, and undermined its ability to fulfill its duties under state law. We urge you to replace them with individuals who will take more seriously their responsibility to manage and conserve New Mexico's wildlife for the benefit of all New Mexicans.

Sincerely,

Kevin Bixby, Executive Director
Southwest Environmental Center

Mary Katherine Ray, Wildlife Chair
Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club

Michael Robinson, Conservation Advocate
Center for Biological Diversity

Bethany Cotton, Wildlife Program Director
WildEarth Guardians

Jan Hayes, Founder
Sandia Mountain BearWatch

David Parsons, Carnivore Conservation
Biologist
The Rewilding Institute

Mark Allison, Executive Director
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

Demis Foster, Executive Director
Conservation Voters New Mexico

Judy Paulsen, New Mexico Representative
Project Coyote

³ **Crabtree RL**, Sheldon JW 1999. Coyotes and Canid Coexistence in Yellowstone National Park. Chapter 6 In *Carnivores in Ecosystems; The Yellowstone Experience*, T. Clark, P. Curlee, P. Kareiva, and S. Minta, eds., Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.