

**Written Statement of Stephanie Garcia Richard, New Mexico
Commissioner of Public Lands**

**U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife**

Hearing on H.R. 7398, Prohibit Wildlife Killing Contests Act of 2022

June 16, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, and distinguished subcommittee members. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today and express my strong support for H.R. 7398, the Prohibit Wildlife Killing Contests Act of 2022.

I am a native New Mexican born on the vast eastern plains of our state and raised in the beautiful Gila Wilderness area located in the southwestern part of New Mexico. I have family that raised cattle both on those eastern plains and in the northern mountains and most of the public land I manage has more cows on it than people!

I have the great honor of serving as the Commissioner of Public Lands for the State of New Mexico. With about 13 million acres under the management of the State Land Office, and a responsibility to steward our lands for current and future generations, we work every day to ensure our land management practices are sound and reflective of conservation science.

Toward this end, one of my first acts as Land Commissioner in 2019 was to issue an Executive Order banning killing contests on state trust lands. Shortly thereafter, New Mexico became the third state to prohibit coyote killing contests. It is my understanding that there are now a total of eight states, including New Mexico, with such bans, with several other states actively considering administrative rulemaking or legislation in this area.

Wildlife killing contests are simply not a sound management practice. Indiscriminate and organized killing contests disrupt healthy and balanced ecosystems – they don't serve any legitimate purpose.

Just because a species is unregulated for game purposes, does not mean it is without value. Predators play an important role in maintaining ecosystem balance with prey, and healthy public lands depend on them.

These types of contests aren't about managing populations, protecting livestock, or traditional hunting values that are held dear to so many communities. This is generalized

killing of species for the mere competition of killing. It is a cruel but also an ecologically damaging practice.

I do believe that people should be able to humanely deal with an offending animal – depredation to agricultural and companion animals is a legitimate concern in the West. But killing contests are not an effective, nor an appropriate way, to deal with human and livestock conflicts with wildlife.

For example, with regard to coyotes, the killing of an alpha breeding pair can actually result in other females increasing breeding levels and litter size. Killing contests do not result in a more balanced a more balanced population – the result is to the contrary.

There is simply no place for killing contests on our public lands. It isn't hunting. It isn't wildlife management. It's just a barbaric decimation of wildlife without justification, and it shouldn't be occurring on our public lands.

As stated so eloquently by hunter and director of Nevada Department of Wildlife Tony Wasley, on discussing the Department's proposed regulation to ban contests, "Killing contests are ethically upsetting by virtue for most members of society. Hunting should not be a competition as such behavior ultimately degrades the value of life and undermines respect for the animals being hunted..." He goes on to say, "... In my ethics as a hunter I hope to defend a deeper and more profound sense of hunting than what I fear coyote contests say to the general public about hunters and our ethics. Hunters need to be conscious of the public image we project and the way in which the public perceives us."

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to speak on behalf of this important legislation.