

Idaho group sponsors youth wolf, coyote derby

By David Erickson

A sportsmen's group in Salmon, Idaho, is sponsoring a two-day coyote and wolf hunting "derby" geared toward kids, with two separate \$1,000 prizes and trophies going to those who kill the largest wolf and the most coyotes. There will also be special awards for youth ages 10-11 and 12-14.

The rules for the Salmon Youth Predator Derby, which is sponsored by the Salmon chapter of Idaho for Wildlife, state that no trapping or spotlights are allowed in the contest and all Idaho Fish and Game rules apply. The derby will be held Dec. 28-29.

"It's not a murder killing spree," said Steve Alder, executive director of Idaho for Wildlife. "Hunting is a tool for us to go out and manage wildlife. And what people don't realize is if you don't manage wolves, you won't have any of them. What people don't understand is they will take the prey base down so low that they'll wink out. You have to manage them. And this is an opportunity for these kids who don't get out a lot to learn how to hunt."

The contest, which costs \$20 to register as a two-person team, will also give out awards for largest male coyote, largest female coyote and most female coyotes killed. There will be fur buyers available after the hunt.

Alder said he doesn't actually expect any wolves to be killed during the hunt.

"One of our outfitters had 40 hunters this year and only saw one wolf," he said. "And he missed. So the chances of getting a wolf are very low. We basically have these events occasionally and it's going to be a youth hunting opportunity. We'll have youth mentors on hand showing them how to hunt. It's a good opportunity in the winter, instead of big game animals, you have a coyote. It's a good way to learn how to hunt. It's also a disease awareness campaign, and we want to educate the public about safety measures in high wolf density areas and how to take precautions."

The disease Alder was referring to is a tapeworm, echinococcus granulosus, which showed up in Idaho game in 2006. The adult is carried by dogs, wolves, foxes and coyotes. The larval form is usually found in the lungs or liver of a herbivore.

The tapeworm requires two different animal species, a canid and an ungulate like deer, sheep, cattle or elk, to complete its lifecycle, according to the Idaho Fish and Game website. During intensive surveillance between 2006 and 2010, 62 percent of wolves tested were determined to be infected in central Idaho.

Idaho for Wildlife's website states that the group is "dedicated to the preservation of Idaho's wildlife." Their motto is: "To protect Idaho's hunting and fishing heritage. To fight against all legal and legislative attempts by the animal rights and anti-gun organizations who are attempting to take away our rights and freedoms under the constitution of the United States of America. To hold all government and state agencies who are stewards of our wildlife accountable and ensure that science is used as the primary role for our wildlife management."

Christine Gertschen, a self-proclaimed environmental activist in Sun Valley, Idaho, has been sending opinion letters to Idaho newspapers and calling Idaho Fish and Game officials to express her disgust with the derby.

"It's an unethical practice in my opinion," she said when reached by phone. "I don't think it's right to pile up a pile of carcasses so you can win a prize for sport killings. It gives hunting a bad name. We had one proposed in Twin Falls last winter and it shows such a lack of respect for hunting wildlife. Hunting is fine, but this is not sportsmanlike. It's repugnant."

Tom Curet, regional supervisor of the Idaho Fish and Game's Salmon zone, said the event is perfectly legal.

"Our department is looking at it as no different than say, as a big buck contest," he said. "As long as people are following the season rules and have a tag, and follow the times of day, it's perfectly legitimate. As long as people are properly licensed and fulfill reporting requirements for wolves. We don't support or oppose it, but our perspective is that it is perfectly legitimate."

Curet said that the state's wolf quota for the Salmon region is 45, and as of

Tuesday only five had been harvested. In the Beaverhead zone, the quota is 10 and only two have been killed, and in the South zone only 15 of the possible 40 have been taken.

“We haven’t hit the harvest limit in each of the past two years,” Curet said. “And we are anticipating maybe just a handful of wolves from this event.”

Registration is taking place at a sporting goods store in Salmon called 93 Outdoor Sports, but a man who answered the phone at the store declined to comment on the event.

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