



Petition decrying Grayson County's coyote killing contest gets 700-plus signees

By Don Richeson

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INDEPENDENCE -- Grayson County's coyote killing contest launched last month is apparently attracting its share of attention -- not so much from participants, at least not yet -- but more from folks opposed to it. The contest is a follow-up to the county's coyote bounty program that started in March. While county officials say that, as of last week, 28 individual hunters had killed 45 coyotes total since the bounty program started, a petition calling for an end to coyote killing contest had reportedly received more than 700 signatures.



DON RICHESON / Declaration

Galax resident Kathleen Dowell shows off her petition last week. It calls on Grayson County officials to stop a coyote-killing contest.

The petition drive is being spearheaded by Galax resident Kathleen Dowell, a substitute preschool teacher and former Grayson County resident. She said when she first heard about the killing contest through a newspaper article she was "shocked and appalled and sick to my stomach." She said she was so overcome with emotion that she had to leave work and cried "a little bit."

"I felt really shocked to learn that these animals were going to be mass murdered and what also got me was how it was referred to by a county supervisor as something fun and creative to engage hunters," she said.

"I felt there must be a better, more humane way to deal with this," she said. "So I went on-line and started researching, reading about coyotes and how other places handled the problem."

She said she learned that killing coyotes can actually lead to increases in the number of coyotes in an area and creates risks to livestock and farmers that would have otherwise not existed.

"I came to find out that when coyotes are left alone, they regulate their own population because they are very territorial," she said. "When you go and kill a whole bunch of them like that it makes the population worse because the females start ovulating and making more and larger litters."

She said that she has recently spent hours researching coyotes. "When my four kids are at school, if I don't have anything else going on, it's what I spend all my time doing," she said.

Although she generally carries a written petition for people to sign, most of her 722 signatures have come through an on-line version posted on the website coyotecoexistence.com, which has a special link for people to click on to sign her petition. The petition reads, "We, the undersigned, want coyote killing contests in our county stopped, and we want our leadership officials to become proactive in support of coexistence. We support a coexistence plan, which involves management through community education programs, presentations and workshops, information websites and other communication forms such as flyers on doorknobs and information in water bills. Please STOP the coyote killing contest scheduled for our area."

Dowell said she is OK with killing specific coyotes a livestock owner actually sees attacking his or her animals. "When you see something eating your animals, it is OK to shoot it," she said. Otherwise, she suggests calling the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' official trappers, who are specially trained to remove known nuisance coyotes.

She said she will keep doing all she can to collect more signatures, which she plans to later present to the Grayson County Board of Supervisors at one of the board's upcoming meetings -- possibly its next regular meeting on the evening of Nov. 13.

While the board of supervisors voted 3-2 in March to enact the bounty program (with Supervisor Brenda Sutherland and Supervisor Kenneth Belton voting against it), county officials say it was launched as more of a test after some said they noticed a decrease in small game in the county, possibly due to coyotes.

The program calls for the payment of \$40 for each dead Grayson County coyote turned in by a Grayson County resident at the county animal control office. The coyote-killing contest calls for a \$500 cash prize to be awarded to the bounty program participant killing the most coyotes between Oct. 15 and May 15, 2015.

The bounty program purposely has a "sunset" provision and will automatically expire on Dec. 31, 2015 unless supervisors vote to re-authorize it, which would only occur after a review of the program's effectiveness and a public hearing. The contest came about through a consensus of three members of the board and did not require a vote.

To volunteer to help Dowell with her petition drive, email her at kathirebecca083@gmail.com.