

Statement by Arizona Game and Fish Commissioner Kurt Davis, as he introduces a motion pertaining to Wildlife Killing Contests on February 7th, 2019:

“Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a motion, but also explain its context with your permission.

As we all know in this room, those who attend an Arizona Game and Fish Commission meeting are likely to hear the Commission discuss the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, the world’s most successful system of wildlife conservation and management.

In fact, the Commission gives its highest recognition annually to a distinguished department employee whose work is devoted to the principles of the North American Model.

In short, as a Commission, all of us adhere to the principles of the North American model. I am also proud to say that this and past commissions have a strong record of being vigilant in applying the North American Model to the rules that govern hunting, fishing and wildlife management in Arizona. I know each of us is also proud of the fact that Arizona hunters have demonstrated their support for the model through their behavior in the field and through their willingness to be the constant and consistent back bone of funding for conservation in our state and nation.

In short, the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is working and is the central reason that this continent set the standard for the world regarding the perpetuation of wildlife for present and future generations.

With that said, as we have done in the past, it is good from time to time, to review and challenge our individual and collective understanding of the North American Model. To review its application to our management systems.

In 2012, the Wildlife Society and the Boone and Crockett Club completed a Technical Review of the North American Model. In that review, they cited early conservationist, George Bird Grinnell, who wrote that “true sportsmen were those who hunted for pleasure (never for profit), who in the field allowed game a sporting chance, and who possessed an aesthetic appreciation of the whole context of sport that included a commitment to its perpetuation.”

The Wildlife Society and Boone and Crockett also cited Grinnell’s “code of the sportsman,” which includes the combined requirements of non-commercial use, and no waste or illegitimate use of all wildlife killed. The code states...a sportsman is one who, when hunting game:

- does so primarily for the pursuit or chase;
- affords game a “sporting” chance (fair chase);
- seeks knowledge of nature and the habits of animals;
- derives no financial profit from game killed;
- will inflict no unnecessary pain or suffering on game; and
- will not waste any game that is killed.

It is also important to note, that this Commission has often contemplated whether there are provisions in our rules that govern the take of wildlife, which may not align with the North American model. Taking game over bait, and use of cameras and drones to locate wildlife are just a couple recent examples of the Commission acting to more strongly align our rules with the model.

Let it be clear, not that hunters that were engaged in lawful pursuits of wildlife, under former or current accepted rules, were acting with ill intent. But, instead it was simply our collective failure to acknowledge that certain practices were outside the tenets of the North American Model.

So, I believe we have an issue before us today that is contrary to two important tenets of the North American Model: one that does not allow the take or use of wildlife for economic benefit, and other that prohibits the take or use of wildlife for wasteful, illegitimate or unsportsmanlike purposes. To continue to permit an activity that is contrary to these two important tenets undermines our duty as trustees for wildlife to ensure the proper use of wildlife.

It is incumbent on all of us in this room that we continually seek to insure a continuation of the public's trust and respect for both the Commission system and the North American Model in the management of our state's 800 plus species of wildlife.

It is also our responsibility to consistently review our operational rules to insure they are based on a strong connection to the North American model, they uphold the highest ethical principles, and they prohibit the take and use of wildlife for economic and illegitimate purposes. As stewards of all wildlife, we owe this to present and future generations.

With that, I believe our rules are not fully in alignment with the North American Model with respect to predator killing contests.

In many instances, wildlife are used in these contests as nothing more than an economic driver where organizers profit from fees and winning participants are awarded valuable prizes. These contests violate the fundamental tenet of the North American Model that prohibits the commercialization of wildlife.

Compounding the issue is these contests are not a legitimate use of wildlife. While the hunting of coyotes and other furbearers is permitted year-round in Arizona, and the Department at times removes predators in specific locations to help ungulate fawns survive, I believe there is a clear disconnect between these legitimate purposes and an illegitimate purpose that links economic gain to the number of predators a person can kill.

These events serve no wildlife management objective. The Commission regularly restricts or expands the use or pursuit of wildlife, based on sophisticated science, surveys, population dynamics, behavior and habitat studies, statistics, weather, contemporary adaptive management, societal issues, etc...This all leads to structured decision making in the management of wildlife that ensure sustainable and healthy populations. In my opinion, predator contests have never been contemplated as an appropriate management tool and they are certainly not congruent with the North American Model.

Again, let me be clear...these activities have not existed by purposeful design or deceit by anyone. Simply, they have occurred by our failure to measure this activity against the tenets of the North American Model. Good people will differ on this, but I believe if the contemplation is through the lens

of the North American Model and the hard work done in technical reviews of its application...the strong majority of Arizona sportsmen and women in Arizona would not and do not support the notion that these contests are in alignment with the North American Model.

In this commissioner's opinion predator contests that have as the primary purpose a profit motive for killing wildlife should not be linked to the honorable endeavor of hunting. And, none of us on this dais has ever subscribed to a theory that our sport, our heritage and our conservation objectives are about contests, money or prizes, but instead about the unwavering and essential ethos of perpetuating wildlife for present and future generations.

Thus, Mr. Chairman, I make a motion that the Department be instructed to take the steps necessary to initiate a special rule making process that reflects the inconsistency of predator contests with the North American model and provides any rule change recommendations that support and build upon our rich tradition of ethical, responsible hunting that is a cornerstone of wildlife conservation in our state."