



Support legislation to end wildlife bounties in South Dakota

The 2019 South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) “Nest Predator Bounty Program” awarded state residents \$10 for each tail of a raccoon, striped skunk, opossum, badger or red fox that they killed and turned in. The South Dakota legislature should take decisive action to end the use of these cruel and pointless bounties that promote the random killing of our state’s native wildlife species.

Public opposition to the cruelty and waste

Many South Dakota residents expressed outrage over the random cruelty inflicted on these native wildlife species by the Nest Predator Bounty Program, its related free trap giveaway, and its ultimate, appalling body count—as of its closing in August of 2019, more than 50,000 tails had been submitted to GFP to receive the \$10 bounty.

Bounties are pointless and ineffective

In its 2014 report to Governor Daugaard, South Dakota’s Habitat Work Group said, “Under a bounty system, predator control would not be targeted enough to be effective. Additionally, bounty systems in other states have been ineffective because the origin of the predators cannot be verified. Predators from other states could easily be imported for a bounty, which would be counterproductive.”¹

The Black Hills Sportsmen’s Club also objected to the Nest Predator Bounty program, saying in a letter to the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission: “Numerous studies have shown that the sustained low level removal of predators from a population often stimulates reproduction in those populations leading to higher predator densities. Additionally, the resulting predator population is composed of a higher proportion of juveniles. These unestablished juvenile predators cover more territory, increasing the likelihood of encountering pheasant nests.” The letter continued, “More importantly, numerous studies, several conducted in South Dakota by State and University personnel have shown the key to pheasant

success is habitat. When habitat is good, pheasants do well.”²

Other hunting groups and state wildlife management professionals agree. In 2016 the Pennsylvania Game Commission reminded hunters, “After decades of using predator control (such as paying bounties) with no effect, and the emergence of wildlife management as a science, the agency finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work.”³ And in its new coyote management plan, the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources stresses that bounties are prone to corruption, expensive, do not increase the harvest of game species, and do not target problem animals.”⁴

The Izaak Walton League of America points out, “The League recognizes the intrinsic value of predatory species and their important ecological roles. ... There is no justification for widespread destruction of animals classified as predators ... The League opposes payment of bounties on predators or varmints.”⁵ And from Ducks Unlimited: “Predator control cannot result in meaningful increases in duck numbers or birds in the bag and threatens to undermine the broad coalition of public support on which modern waterfowl conservation depends.”⁶

The Mississippi Flyway Council, established in 1952 to coordinate the management of migratory game birds in that region, has said, “The Mississippi Flyway Council (MFC) does not support the practice of predator removal as a viable management practice to improve waterfowl



A waste of state funds

In March of 2019, a GFP wildlife damage specialist estimated to *AgWeek* that as much as \$400,000 of South Dakota hunting license revenue would be used as payout for the Nest Predator Bounty Program. In the same article, however, GFP staff admitted that the real intent of the program is to recruit new people to hunting, fishing, and trapping in the state—but added that the state does not have a specific budget for hunter recruitment efforts.⁹ Why, then, was the state willing to commit hundreds of thousands of dollars of its hunting license revenue to a pointless and counterproductive bounty program?

The key to more game birds is good habitat

The random killing of native species is a wrongheaded approach that ultimately will not help pheasants and other game birds, whose numbers are affected by weather and the availability of suitable habitat. In January of 2019 the editorial board of the *Capital Journal* opposed the Nest Predator Bounty Program, saying that if the state wants to advance pheasant hunting opportunities, it must “...focus on habitat, primarily grasslands and wetlands, work with landowners to secure those habitat(s) through incentives, provide hunter access through a strong walk-in program and raise suitable funding to get it done.”¹⁰ And the *Rapid City Journal* editorial board agreed: “The three biggest factors affecting pheasant numbers are habitat, habitat and habitat, followed by weather and more weather.”¹¹



recruitment over the long term or over large geographic areas,” adding that, instead, habitat restoration is a priority for improving waterfowl recruitment.⁷ And the National Wild Turkey Federation states, “Removing a random predator from the landscape has no impact whatsoever on widespread turkey populations...Without good nesting habitat, eggs and poults are simply more vulnerable. Turkeys evolved to cope with predators. As long as they have a place to hide their nests and raise their young, they’ll do just fine without predator control.”⁸

No justification for removal of vital native species

No sound, science-based evidence has been presented to suggest that raccoons, striped skunks, opossums, badgers or red foxes are adversely impacting pheasant populations in South Dakota. There is also no scientific justification for the random removal of those native species, each of whom plays a unique and important role in South Dakota’s ecosystem. In particular, opossums are a tremendous benefit to any area they inhabit, helping to control unwanted, harmful garden pests. Their diet includes snails, mice, rats, and insects such as cockroaches, crickets, beetles, and—in large numbers—disease-carrying ticks.

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¹ “South Dakota Governor’s Habitat Work Group 2014: Report to Governor Dugard,” pg. 20, September 2014.

<https://habitat.sd.gov/resources/habitatsummitinfo/docs/PHWG%20Final%20Report.pdf>

² Letter from Black Hills Sportsmen’s Club to South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission, April 2, 2019.

<https://blackhillssportsmenclub.com/pages/hunting-film-tour-2018>

³ Bob Frye, “Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations,” *Trib Live*, July 25, 2016 <http://triblive.com/sports/outdoors/10756490-74/game-predator-predators>.

⁴ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, “Coyote Management Plan,” March 1, 2018

https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Species/Coyote%20Management%20Plan_FINAL_030118.pdf

⁵ The Izaak Walton League of America: “Conservation Policies 2019,” pg. 54 <https://www.iwla.org/docs/default-source/about-iwla/2019-policy-book.pdf?sfvrsn=44>

⁶ Chuck Petrie: “Prairies Under Siege: Ducks, Habitat Conservation & Predators,” in the November/December 2003 *Ducks Unlimited* magazine.

<https://www.ducks.org/conservation/where-ducks-unlimited-works/prairie-pothole-region/prairies-under-siege-ducks-habitat-conservation-predators>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The National Wild Turkey Federation: “Coexist with Predators” <http://www.nwtf.org/conservation/article/coexist-predators>

⁹ Nick Lowrey: “South Dakota pheasant nest predator bounty program proposed.” *AgWeek*, March 4, 2019

<https://www.agweek.com/sports/outdoors/4579780-south-dakota-pheasant-nest-predator-bounty-program-proposed>

¹⁰ *Capitol Journal* Editorial Board: “State dollars shouldn’t be used on predator bounties,” January 15, 2019

https://www.capjournal.com/opinions/editorial/state-dollars-shouldn-t-be-used-on-predator-bounties/article_f999dda-1941-11e9-97b2-afc846d80c64.html

¹¹ *Rapid City Journal* Editorial Board: “OURS: Brood counts blow holes in predator bounty rationale,” September 13, 2019

https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/opinion/editorial/ours-brood-counts-blow-holes-in-predator-bountyrationale/article_215b420d-5ca1-5230-b7d7-7bea814c662a.html