



Coyote contests renew debate over legality, Al's Corner Store in West Carleton one of two contests now under way

Posted Jan 27, 2011

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EMC News - The start of two coyote hunting contests has renewed the debate over whether or not the activity is legal.

Al's Corner Store, located at the corner of Galetta Side Road and old Highway 17, is sponsoring 'Al's Coyote Contest' until March 15 and the Osgoode Township Fish and Game and Conservation Club is sponsoring a contest until March 14. Both Al's contest and the Osgoode contest offer prizes.

This marks the second year that both are holding the contests and they are held in response to the increased coyote presence in the areas of West Carleton-March and Osgoode/North Gower.

"Everything is legal. To enter you must be a licensed hunter or trapper," Al's Corner Store owner Al Mills stated.

He noted he's not sure what all the fuss is about regarding the contest and says it is the only way for farmers to protect their livestock.

"I don't know what they (opponents) are trying to prove," he told the EMC. "It's a big issue."

Mills said so far, this year's contest is exceeding last year's numbers of coyotes brought in.

Under the terms of the contest he is running, any legally harvested coyote that is brought in will be registered and weighed. Harvest location and weight information collected is provided voluntarily to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

But not everyone agrees that having such contests is a good way to reduce the coyote population and the threat to livestock.

"The illegal nature of this activity is disturbing," said Barry MacKay, Canadian Representative of Born Free USA and spokesperson for the Ontario Wildlife Coalition, in a news release. "But even more disturbing is the fact that the MNR (Ministry of Natural Resources) allows coyotes to be demonized and destroyed without intervention. If illegal activities won't move the minister (Linda Jeffrey) what will?"

The Ontario Wildlife Coalition contacted the MNR early last year when the first contests sprang up and then again in November 2010. But, the group has received no response.

"There is a clear admission on the part of the MNR that the coyote contests are illegal. But these illegal acts are simply not important enough for the minister to take action," said West Carleton resident Donna DuBreuil, president of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre and a spokesperson for the Ontario Wildlife Coalition. "I think people are really astounded that this contest goes on."

She lays blame squarely at the feet of the MNR and told the EMC that since the organization gets 76 per cent of its fish and wildlife funds from licensing hunters, she is not surprised no action is being taken.

"How can you police the people that you are getting funds for?" Dubreuil asked. "The government needs to modernize this ministry (MNR)...to represent the majority of the people."

For her part, Dubreuil said she would rather see the province provide a program that offers financial assistance to farmers to keep coyotes out rather than allow the hunt to continue.

Liz White, director of Animal Alliance of Canada and another spokesperson for the Ontario Wildlife Coalition, said her organization had lawyer Peter Copeland review the legislation and he also wrote

to Jeffrey.

"In his letter to the minister, he wrote that the offering of a prize to encourage a coyote cull is contrary to the prohibitions on bounties and on hunting for the expectation of gain."

Regardless of what side of the issue people are on, most agree the MNR is not helping the situation by not taking any action.

"This is always in the hands of the ministry," said Ward 5 West Carleton-March councillor Eli El-Chantiry, who admitted he didn't know much about the coyote contest.

"We do have obviously areas that are heavily populated with coyotes. I'm not so sure a contest is the answer. "We had asked the province time and time again to step in and work with wildlife organizations for education and how to control the population. It is not in the hands of the municipality."

His major concern is that participants in the coyote contest do so safely and are in a legal position to hunt.

"The only thing I would say to people who are entering the contests is to be careful of people in the bushes, there are kids on the trails," El-Chantiry urged. "I don't want to make it sound like I am anti-this or anti-that. It seems there is a neglect of responsibility from the MNR to help manage this issue."

As for Mills, he said a second contest will open after the current one closes and it will run all year long.

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