



April, 2010

Dear Friend,

Thank you! Because of you and others like you who care about animals and the environment, we've won a major victory for baby grey seals in Nova Scotia.

Using the proven strategies and tactics that worked for the grey seals, I'm hoping – and asking – that you'll join me in fighting for a similar victory for coyotes in Saskatchewan, a victory that will have repercussions across Canada.

What do Nova Scotia baby grey seals and Saskatchewan coyotes have in common? Government ministers condemned both to death row for no other reason than to win votes. These are “political” killings.

When politicians and governments' so-called “scientists” tell you that animals need to be killed off for their own good or to save some other animal or to protect the environment, the truth is they're always lying. Politicians always “sell” the killing of animals by appealing to some noble cause or invoking a primal fear.

Politicians tell us that baby harp seals are shot, clubbed, and skinned to save the cod or to preserve an ancient culture – never admitting it's because sealers demand that politicians let them take more and more pelts to sell to the fur fashion industry.

Wolves, they say, are shot, trapped, and poisoned to save the caribou and moose – not to placate sport hunters who complain to politicians that wolves are eating some of the caribou and moose they want to hunt.

Deer are shot to save them from overpopulation or to stop them supposedly damaging rare forest ecologies – not to pander to sport hunters demanding politicians give them more chances to kill deer.

Cormorants are shot to stop them taking over the habitat of desirable birds – not to assuage sport fishermen complaining (with no justification) that cormorants are eating the fish they want to catch.

Bears are shot to protect hikers, townspeople (particularly children), and small pets – not because the sport hunting outfitter industry pressures politicians to give them more bears to kill to market to wealthy American trophy hunters.

This is the self-serving balderdash that politicians traffic in. Too often, journalists uncritically pass the politicians' lies on to listeners, viewers, and readers – calling it news and convincing too many of the public to believe the lies.

The good news is that when people like you and me aggressively expose the politicians' lies in the press or the courts, they often quickly retreat, and animals' lives are saved. That's what happened earlier this year in Nova Scotia.

Fishing for votes from fishermen in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia's NDP government rammed through an amendment that gutted the province's Wilderness Areas Protection Act. The amendment made legal a commercial slaughter of baby

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grey seals on Hay Island, part of the Scaterie Island Protected Wilderness Area in Cape Breton. The amendment also set a dangerous precedent – the first in Nova Scotia – for allowing commercial exploitation of wildlife in a legally protected wilderness area.

To fight the amendment, I and dozens of others – including scientists, lawyers, and representatives of wildlife and environmental protection groups – testified before the legislative committee considering the amendment. Our message was consistent. There is no rational ecological reason to kill the baby grey seals on Hay Island. And, as the lawyers argued, the amendment is likely illegal under the present law.

But, the politicians on the committee weren't interested in either the facts or what we had to say about the importance of maintaining the ecological integrity of protected areas. They were only interested in one thing: fishermen's votes in Cape Breton. The committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment, and the next day the Nova Scotia legislature passed it.

We then took our fight to Nova Scotia's Environment/Fisheries Minister Sterling Belliveau. I and representatives from Humane Society International and the Atlantic Canadian Anti-sealing Coalition asked the Minister to exercise his discretion under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act and its new amendment and cancel the hunt.

He told us he had a good understanding of the hunt and the issues. But, very quickly it became clear to me and my colleagues that he knew very little. He didn't know, for example, that the pups were killed with baseball bats and box cutters. He had no idea of the ecological consequences of the hunt. He didn't care about the precedent being set. He wasn't able to offer even one valid reason for allowing the slaughter to occur. All Belliveau, a fishermen himself, cared about was that fishermen on Cape Breton Island – voters – wanted to kill seals. It didn't matter why, and it didn't matter that the killings would be in a wilderness protected area.

We then retained a Halifax-based lawyer. It was clear to us that the amendment contravened not only the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, but also other Nova Scotia environmental protection legislation.

The more we worked to protect the seals and moved to challenge the amendment in court, the more Nova Scotians learned of the travesty that the NDP government was wreaking on their province's environmental and wildlife protection laws.

The day the sealers were set to leave for Hay Island, February 8th, the Nova Scotia government pulled the plug on the hunt. Neither the fishermen nor the politicians were forthcoming about the real reasons behind the cancellation of the hunt. Each blamed the other.

The real reason, in my view, was that Nova Scotia's politicians realized that because of the work we and others were doing to protect the baby grey seals, any political benefit they hoped to gain from a handful of Cape Breton fishermen would be overwhelmed by losses elsewhere in Nova Scotia. So, the politicians found convenient reasons to cancel the hunt and limit the political damage.

Now to Saskatchewan. Late last year, Minister of Agriculture Bob Bjornerud put a \$20 per head bounty on coyotes for the same reason that Belliveau in Nova Scotia wanted his baby grey seal hunt – to win votes.

Bjornerud used the bounty to win the “hearts and minds”, but more importantly, the votes of farmers and ranchers who had lost some livestock to coyotes. He certainly knew, because Saskatchewan’s wildlife protection organizations were telling him, that bounties don’t work. But, Bjornerud wasn’t interested in protecting livestock; he was interested in protecting votes.

The coyote bounty resulted in the deaths of over 23,000 animals, and has been a livestock protection fiasco. So what’s Bjornerud doing now? First, the coyote bounty has been cancelled, and farmers and ranchers will be compensated for any livestock losses. That’s what Bjornerud should have done in the first place.

But, the coyotes are not safe. As Bjornerud says, “We need to remove some of the predators that are costing money out there.” Every indication is that he’s going to do that using Compound 1080, a deadly poison banned in many provinces because it doesn’t just kill the target species, but other animals as well. Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction left in Canada still using Compound 1080.

At the same time, Bjornerud is implementing another incredibly ill-considered animal killing program, once again because of complaints from the vote-rich farmers and ranchers. This time it’s a massive, province-wide assault on Richardson’s ground squirrels, “gophers” as they’re called in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan government has officially designated gophers as “pests” under the Pest Control Act, which means that almost any means can be used to eradicate them, including the use of poisons like strychnine that, like Compound 1080, kill other animals.

None of this makes any ethical, ecological, livestock protection, or economic sense. Killing off coyotes allows gopher populations to increase. Killing off gophers forces coyotes to seek food elsewhere, sometimes livestock. Killing off either or both has dire consequences for species that depend on their critical presence in the ecological food web, species like foxes, hawks, owls, and badgers.

Just as we worked to end the baby grey seal hunt in Nova Scotia, we must confront the Saskatchewan government’s political killings of coyotes and Richardson’s ground squirrels. The more often we expose politicians both in the press and in the courts when they choose the slaughter of animals for political advantage, the less likely they will be in the future to choose the animal-killing option. There must be public, legal, and political consequences when politicians sacrifice animals and the environment for votes. If there’s not, they’ll never stop.

With your help, there are two parallel strategies we’ll pursue with Saskatchewan.

The first is to ask Premier Brad Wall of Saskatchewan for two things. One is to ban the use of Compound 1080 and to start by not renewing his government’s federal permit for it. Saskatchewan’s current permit expires at the end of 2010. The second is to remove from the Department of Agriculture the responsibility for dealing with any of Saskatchewan’s wildlife. This responsibility should be with the Ministry of the Environment.

A responsible balance between the preservation and enhancement of wildlife and ecological systems on the one hand and livestock and crop production on the other is possible and, in fact, crucial for all our sakes. The Department of Agriculture, however, views all wildlife as “pests” and has proven that it and the Minister are incapable of finding that vital balance.

Included with this letter is a “Sign On” letter for Premier Wall. Please, add your name and address to the letter, along with any comments you might have and put it in the mail.

The second strategy is to seek a federal ban on Compound 1080.

To pursue the two strategies, we’ll be making numerous formal presentations to Premier Wall; Saskatchewan legislative committees; the Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, the federal minister of health; and officials at Health Canada, the federal department that regulates Compound 1080. The presentations will include comprehensive scientific and legal arguments.

To make our case for the animals and the environment as effectively as possible, please support this effort with a generous contribution. Your donation will help us not only compile and publish the support documents, but also retain the necessary scientists and lawyers who will help us make the case. They in turn will give the issues the profile they need to be covered properly by the press.

I urge you to review the Premier Wall Sign On letter and mail it to him as soon as you can. And I hope, for the sake of coyotes and Richardson’s ground squirrels – and all the other animals in Canada cruelly and unnecessarily killed so that politicians can protect votes – that you’ll find it in your heart to support this campaign with a generous gift.

With thanks, and for the animals and the environment,



A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Liz White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Liz White
Director

P.S. Thanks to the financial support of people like you, we convinced British Columbia to ban Compound 1080.

With your support, we can get the federal ban, too. Compound 1080 is a cruel poison that doesn’t just kill the target species. It persists in the environment and endangers all mammals, birds, and insects.