



Sample Letter to the Editor

[Date]

To the Editor:

The prairie dog killing contest scheduled for **[day and date]** in **[name of community]** should be canceled without delay.

Killing contests—in which participants compete for prizes to see who can kill the most animals—are condemned by hunters and nonhunters alike. They are celebrations of animal cruelty, with contestants bragging about their “specialty” shots, such as the “chamois shot,” in which the bullet literally explodes the animal, and the “red mist,” in which the victim is obscured in a spray of blood.

At the range at which contestants shoot at the small animals, usually 200 yards or more, a high percentage of wounded animals is inevitable. It is unknown exactly how many are maimed and suffer a slow, agonizing death.

Although ranchers complain that prairie dogs compete with cattle for grass, there is no evidence that this is true. In fact, Colorado State University research biologist James Detling, PhD, told *National Geographic* magazine, “Given the choice, bison and pronghorn prefer to graze on dog towns. I am as certain as I’m sitting here that cattle do too. ...” And although shooters piously claim to be helping the environment, they are, in fact, destroying a species that is essential to the health of prairie ecosystems and whose population is in free-fall all across the West.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Local group]

Stop Wildlife Killing Contests





Sample Press Release

[Local Group] Urges Cancellation of Prairie Dog Killing Contest

The [local group] has called upon the [town council, county commissioners, or sponsors] of [town or city, state] to cancel a prairie dog killing contest scheduled for [day and date].

Using rapid-fire, long-range rifles that shoot bullets designed to explode on impact, contestants set up just far enough away from a prairie dog town, usually 200 yards or more, that the animals won't be spooked by the crack of the rifles and the smell of gunsmoke.

In a letter to [letter recipient] dated [date], [name and title] of the [local group] said, "Killing contests—in which participants compete for prizes to see who can kill the most animals—are condemned by hunters and nonhunters alike. They are barbaric celebrations of animal cruelty, and they are destructive to the environment."

The letter explained why the [local group] believes the contest should be canceled:

"In addition to their body count, contestants may bet extra points for 'specialty' shots. These include the 'acrobat,' in which the impact of the bullet flips the animal into the air; the 'chamois shot,' in which the bullet literally explodes the animal, sending a large piece of pelt flying through the air; and the 'red mist,' in which the victim is obscured in a spray of blood.

"Many hunters are quick to condemn killing contests as a violation of the hunters' ethic of 'fair chase.' They take place in a sophomoric atmosphere in which the death of an animal is the occasion for bragging, kidding, and jokes.

"...Prairie dogs are a keystone species, vital to the health of entire ecosystems. Their digging aerates and enriches the soil, stimulating the growth of prairie grass. ... The prairie dogs themselves are essential prey for owls, hawks, foxes, and most especially endangered black-footed ferrets, who cannot survive outside of prairie dog habitat.

"The [name of contest] is a blot on our community," [spokesperson for group] stated. "We should not be known for declaring a 'winner' based upon who is able to kill the most animals."

Stop Wildlife  Killing Contests



Killing Contests Combine Animal Cruelty and Environmental Destruction

[Name of community] has scheduled a prairie dog killing contest for [day and date]. For those who may not be familiar with these contests, participants compete for prizes to see who can kill the most animals in a fixed period of time.

Using rapid-fire, long-range rifles that shoot bullets designed to explode on impact, contestants set up just far enough away from a prairie dog town, usually 200 yards or more, that the animals won't be spooked by the crack of the rifles and the smell of the gunsmoke. A popular contest killing website advises prairie dog shooters to plan on firing between 300 and 500 rounds each day.

In addition to their body count, contestants may get extra points for "specialty" shots. These include the "acrobat," in which the impact of the bullet flips the animal into the air; the "chamois shot," in which the bullet literally explodes the animal, sending a large piece of pelt flying through the air; and the "red mist," in which the victim is obscured in a spray of blood.

Prairie dog killing contests are not hunting, and many hunters are quick to condemn them as a violation of the hunters' ethic of "fair chase." The contests take place in a sophomoric atmosphere in which the death of an animal is the occasion for bragging, kidding, and jokes.

The "lethal circle" of the prairie dog—the region of the body where a single shot can be expected to kill instantly—is quite small, encompassing the head and the heart-lung area. At the distance from which contestants shoot, a high percentage of wounded animals is inevitable. But it is unknown exactly how many suffer a slow, agonizing death.

The smokescreen argument for prairie dog contests is that they save ranchers from a dangerous and costly infestation of pests. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. Although ranchers complain that prairie dogs compete with cattle for grass, there is no evidence that this is true. Prairie dogs have coexisted with bison and pronghorn antelope for tens of thousands of years. Colorado State University research biologist James Detling, PhD, told *National Geographic* magazine, "Given the choice, bison and



pronghorn prefer to graze on dog towns. I am as certain as I'm sitting here that cattle do too, but I don't have data to prove that."

Contest participants also perpetuate a baseless myth that cattle are at risk of breaking their legs in prairie dog holes. Horses being ridden or driven are at some risk, as are stampeding cattle, but cattle who are grazing or moving along at a normal pace watch where they are going, and the risk of stepping into prairie dog holes is negligible.

Prairie dogs are a keystone species, vital to the health of the entire ecosystem. Their digging aerates and enriches the soil, stimulating the growth of prairie grass. Their burrows provide cover for ground owls, foxes, rabbits, plovers, badgers, snakes, toads, and a multitude of insects, all of whom are essential to the plains. Prairie dogs themselves are essential prey for owls, hawks, foxes, and most especially endangered black-footed ferrets, who cannot survive outside of prairie dog habitat. Although shooters piously claim to be helping the environment, they are, in fact, destroying animals who are essential to the health of prairie ecosystems.

Prairie dog killing contests are barbaric in their celebration of animal cruelty, and they do nothing to help cattle, who do not need protection from prairie dogs. The contests are also destructive to the environment, in that they bring about the slaughter of members of a species that is essential to the ecosystem and whose population is in free-fall throughout its range. No community should want to be associated with them.

[Name, mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail]



[Date]

Dear [Sponsor]:

Please reconsider and withdraw your support from the prairie dog killing contest scheduled for [day and date] in [name of community]. Killing contests—in which participants compete for prizes to see who can kill the most animals—are condemned by hunters and nonhunters alike. They are barbaric celebrations of animal cruelty, and they are destructive to the environment.

Using rapid-fire, long-range rifles that shoot bullets designed to explode on impact, contestants set up just far enough away from a prairie dog town, usually 200 yards or more, that the animals won't be spooked by the crack of the rifles and the smell of the gunsmoke. A popular contest killing website advises prairie dog shooters to plan on firing between 300 and 500 rounds each day.

In addition to their body count, contestants may get extra points for “specialty” shots. These include the “acrobat,” in which the impact of the bullet flips the animal into the air; the “chamois shot,” in which the bullet literally explodes the animal, sending a large piece of pelt flying through the air; and the “red mist,” in which the victim is obscured in a spray of blood.

Many hunters are quick to condemn killing contests as a violation of the hunters' ethic of “fair chase.” They take place in a sophomoric atmosphere in which the death of an animal is the occasion for bragging, kidding, and jokes.

The “lethal circle” of the prairie dog—the region of the body in which a single shot can be expected to kill instantly—is quite small, encompassing the head and the heart-lung area. At the distance from which contestants shoot, a high percentage of wounded animals is inevitable. But it is unknown exactly how many suffer a slow, agonizing death.

The smokescreen argument for prairie dog contests is that they save ranchers from a dangerous and costly infestation of pests. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. Although ranchers complain that prairie dogs compete with cattle for grass, there is no evidence that this is true. Prairie dogs have coexisted with bison and pronghorn antelope for tens of thousands of years. Colorado State University research biologist James Detling, PhD, told *National Geographic* magazine, “Given the choice, bison and pronghorn prefer to graze on dog towns. I am as certain as I'm sitting here that cattle do too, but I don't have data to prove that.”

Stop Wildlife Killing Contests





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Prairie dogs are a keystone species, vital to the health of entire ecosystems. Their digging aerates and enriches the soil, stimulating the growth of prairie grass. Their burrows provide cover for ground owls, foxes, rabbits, plovers, badgers, snakes, toads, and a multitude of insects, all of whom are essential to the plains. The prairie dogs themselves are essential prey for owls, hawks, foxes, and most especially endangered black-footed ferrets, who cannot survive outside of prairie dog habitat. Although shooters piously claim to be helping the environment, they are, in fact, destroying animals who are essential to the health of prairie ecosystems.

In summary, prairie dog killing contests are barbaric in their celebration of animal cruelty, and they do nothing to help cattle, who do not need protection from prairie dogs. They are also destructive to the environment, in that they bring about the slaughter of members of a species that is essential to the ecosystem and whose population is in free-fall throughout its range. No community should want to be associated with killing contests.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you about this matter at your earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Local Group]
[Contact Info]