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Statement before TRW Committee, Thermopolis,Wy.

From John Fandek, Cora, Wyoming

In my recollection, snowmobiles first became available and popular in western Wyoming in the mid-1960s. It wasn't long before a certain element of the population realized that here was a new and fun way to kill stuff. This activity really blossomed in the 1970s when fur prices were high and, as with any resource, when a dollar value is placed on something, it brings the rats out of the woodwork. Now, in some cases, running down coyotes and foxes with snowmobiles has evolved into merely fun-time family recreation. Even without the incentive of realizing money from fur sales, I have seen where coyotes and foxes have been run down and killed and then left where they lay.

Picture this if you can: A snowmobiler – or a group of snowmobilers – appear on a ridge overlooking an expanse of wide- open Wyoming rangeland. These people are “hunting” coyotes. Some of the machines they are riding would likely have been customized for killing, sporting carriers for extra fuel to allow for all day operations; a pistol holster mounted in an easy-to-reach location; a rifle scabbard fastened to the side of the tunnel. Using binoculars, a coyote is spotted, maybe a half mile away, going about the daily business of survival. Engines roar to life and within seconds, on machines that can travel at 60 or 70 miles per hour, the animal is literally run to death – run down, run over, blood spewing out its mouth from ruptured lungs. Those who are really accomplished in this lovely sport will stop their machine on top of the animal and then bash its skull with a ballpeen hammer carried

specifically for that purpose. Lacking that level of expertise, the animal is repeatedly run over until it is crushed and crumpled. If it is still clinging to life, the victim can be grasped by the hind legs and slung like a wet towel, bashing its head into the ski structure of the machine. It is a fun time.

I have seen it all. For over 40 years I was manager/operator of a large ranch on the Upper Green River in western Wyoming. Over that time period I was on the scene in numerous incidents dealing with people involved in this despicable activity. Two times I was threatened with potential violence, once with a knife and once with a rifle. Two times I was instrumental in bringing successful arrests and convictions. But the arrests and convictions were not brought because of the evilness of the activity involved or because of the threat of violence. No, the arrests were made for trespassing on private property. In Wyoming, the killing of wildlife in this manner is seemingly O.K. And that has to change.

As things stand now, this atrocious activity of running down animals with a motor vehicle is seen as of minor import to Wyoming law enforcement officials, not because they condone this activity (though some might) but because there is no law against it. In one case involving myself, a deputy sheriff was sent to the perpetrator's home to interview and investigate. The deputy was the perpetrator's son. No conflict of interest there! In another incident, snowmobilers had entered a Wyoming Game and Fish elk feed ground while chasing and shooting at coyotes, stampeding the elk off the feed ground in the process. It is, of course, illegal for the public to enter these areas during the winter when elk are being fed. The warden of the district did not even respond to the report or investigate.

For a glimpse into the character of people involved in this madness, consider the following: One fellow once bragged to me that he had

once run down a coyote on the groomed snowmobile trail in Yellowstone Park. He wrapped the crippled and broken carcass in his parka, tied the parcel on the back of his snowmobile and headed for the parking lot at Flagg Ranch. By the time he had arrived at his truck the coyote had recovered enough to begin struggling within its wrappings. Other people were there in the lot but this genius was able to get the thrashing animal into the back of his covered pickup box where he bludgeoned it to death with a lug wrench. This man relayed this incident as if it was the funniest thing he had ever experienced. In another incident, a group of four people ran down and killed a Canadian lynx (a federally protected animal) on the ranch property where I lived and worked at the time. They had encountered two lynx traveling together and bemoaned the fact that the second lynx had escaped. These people refused to identify themselves and disappeared in a cloud of blowing snow. This kind of activity goes on every day all winter long in the snow country of Wyoming.

I am closing in on 77 years of age. I am a hunter, and have been all my life. I still actively hunt each fall. The kind of activity described in this statement is not hunting; it is merely despicable, disgusting killing. And it destroys the credibility and reputation of those hunters who go about the activity of hunting in an ethical and respectful manner.

I hope this committee can agree with me that chasing and running down wildlife is not acceptable in any circumstance. A law to curtail this activity will not entirely stop this outrageous behavior, but threat of arrest and penalties will give pause to some.

