

Environmentalists ask judge to halt wolf derby

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the Associated Press

Environmental groups Monday asked a federal judge to halt a planned wolf and coyote derby in Idaho, branding the event an illegal killing contest.

The complaint by Wild Earth Guardians and other environmental groups in U.S. District Court in Pocatello contends that the U.S. Forest Service ignored federal laws by allowing the derby to proceed this Saturday and Sunday without requiring its organizers to first secure a special-use permit for a commercial event.

A group behind the event, a pro-hunting organization called Idaho for Wildlife, aims to lure up to 300 hunters to Salmon, Idaho, including children, to boost the economy _ and raise awareness for health concerns it says are related to wolves.

The environmentalists say the Forest Service failed to follow its own procedures and violated the National Environmental Policy Act by "failing entirely to consider the environmental impacts of allowing the killing contest."

"The Forest Service's failure to follow its own regulations relating to special use authorization and its failure to comply with NEPA ... results in uninformed decisions and creates an increased risk of actual, threatened, and imminent harm to Guardians' members concrete interests in the public lands and Salmon-Challis particularly," according to the lawsuit, which asks a judge to issue a temporary restraining order to halt the event.

Wolves are game animals in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming after federal Endangered Species Act protections were lifted starting in 2011. There are annual hunting and trapping seasons.

Idaho has about 680 wolves, according to 2012 estimates, following their reintroduction to the state starting in 1995 after they were nearly wiped out in the 1970s.

While coyote derbies aren't uncommon around the West, including wolves in a contest offering up to \$2,000 in cash prizes and trophies has sparked an outcry among environmental groups. Joining Wild Earth Guardians in the lawsuit were Project Coyote, Western Watersheds Project, Boulder-White Clouds Council, and Animal Welfare Institute.

In mid-December, Idaho for Wildlife approached both the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management that oversee large swaths of land around Salmon, about the event.

Both are federal agencies, but have different regulations governing land they manage and when people who use it must get a permit for their activities.

The Forest Service concluded its regulations don't require a special use permit for the derby, while the Bureau of Land Management said its rules do require a permit for competitive events and organized events

Salmon-Challis National Forest supervisor Chuck Mark didn't immediately return a phone call seeking comment on Monday.

But Steve Alder, president of Idaho for Wildlife, said he's been assured by the agency the event is legal without a permit. Just to make sure, Alder said, organizers are no longer asking for a \$20 entry fee, instead seeking donations from participating hunters.

He expects a big crowd to descend on Salmon this weekend, including participants and opponents.

"The motels are booked," Alder said. "I think it's going to be big. We're going to have a lot of enviro people there too."

Linda Price, field manager for the BLM's office in Salmon, said her agency didn't have enough time to conduct the necessary review to issue such a permit by this weekend's event.

As a result, Price said, its organizers are directing participants to Forest Service territory _ as well as private ranching ground whose owners agreed to let them use it _ and instructing them to avoid BLM ground.

Alder contends that the wolf derby is meant to publicize potential human health risks from *Echinococcus granulosus*, a tapeworm whose hosts include elk, wolves and domesticated dogs. He and other event organizers say they fear dogs infected by sniffing or eating wolf feces could transmit the tapeworm to humans, where they could cause cysts.

Idaho health officials, however, told The Associated Press last week that they haven't discovered any evidence of wolf-human transmission.