

FWC moves toward prohibiting fox, coyote enclosures

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The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) voted Wednesday to move forward with a draft rule prohibiting the operation of fox and coyote enclosures. The decision followed consideration of a suite of options to improve the process governing the enclosures and listening to several hours of comments from the public.

The presentation by Maj. Curtis Brown with the FWC's Captive Wildlife and Investigations Section focused on humane treatment of foxes and coyotes and translocation of disease. He proposed three options for consideration, including prohibiting the enclosures outright, continuing to allow the enclosures with stricter regulations or phasing out the enclosures by January of 2013.

After six hours of discussion and testimonies from about 80 members of the public, whose responses varied from calling the practice a "valued family tradition" to a "cruel practice and threat to traditional hunting," Chairman Rodney Barreto began the decision-making portion of the meeting.

"As long as I've been with the Commission, we've vigorously supported hunting in Florida. I don't believe this is fair chase," Barreto said. "I feel Florida needs to be a leader in America. We need to end the use of these enclosures and end them now."

For nearly a year, the FWC has been working to make the right decisions regarding the controversial practice of chasing foxes and coyotes with dogs within enclosures. FWC staff and Commissioners have worked with the public to improve both the permit process for the enclosures and the methods by which they are maintained.

Last September, FWC Commissioners directed the agency's law enforcement staff to review the permitting process and research the history and number of such enclosures in the state. The Commission also ceased issuing fox and coyote enclosure permits at that time.

At the February 2010 Commission meeting, Commissioners approved the temporary prohibition of chasing foxes and coyotes in enclosures. FWC staff was directed to work with stakeholders to address certain issues of concern regarding the enclosures and to draft rules guiding them.

FWC staff will publish a draft rule that details the definition of an enclosure, contains language addressing the prohibition and establishes a timeline for relinquishing foxes and coyotes currently in possession. Staff was directed to bring a final rule back for consideration to the September meeting in Weston. FWC staff also agreed to explore further options for dog-hunting of foxes and coyotes on open public lands around the state.