

Dead coyotes found strapped to BLM fence

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LAS CRUCES - Five coyotes, each strung up by a hind leg, dangled lifelessly Monday from a chain-link fence on the West Mesa.

Not very decomposed, they were likely the remnant of someone's hunting spree in recent days.

The sight was bound to draw the attention of travelers along Do-a Ana County Road B-006, west of Mesilla Dam, where the dead animals hung just feet from the dirt roadway. The dam is one of the few points people use to reach the western side of the river and its expanse of public land from Las Cruces and Mesilla.

Coyote hunting is legal. Indeed, the species doesn't appear on the regulatory radar of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, which oversees hunting, said Dan Williams, spokesman for the agency. No hunting license is needed for coyotes.

"There are no harvest limits or rules regarding the taking of the animals," he said.

Sometimes, Williams said, landowners shoot coyotes that are preying on livestock. Other hunters kill them for sport. And still others hunt them in the wintertime for their pelts, which can be sold, he said.

In the case of the coyotes off County Road B-006, they weren't skinned out, so the shooter wasn't after the pelts.

Williams said it's not uncommon to see dead coyotes hung upon on fences in rural parts of the state, though it is unusual to see five at once. There's a chance some people believe the practice deters other coyotes from an area.

However, ego may be a bigger factor.

"It's more likely that someone went out and killed some coyotes and was showing off," he said.

Williams noted, of course, that only the hunter or hunters know for sure.

The coyotes were hung upon a chain-link fence - about a half-mile west of the dam - that lines the dirt road. The fence, falling apart in some places, is on U.S. Bureau of Land Management property.

The chain-link was put up in connection with an old landfill the county used to operate on the mesa, said Tom Phillips, with the BLM's Las Cruces office. It was either a remnant of the operation or part of the BLM's effort to reclaim the land.

So, did the hunter or hunters violate any rules by hanging dead coyotes on a publicly owned fence?

At first glance, Phillips said he doubts it would be considered a criminal act. He said he doesn't think it would be vandalism. As far as tastefulness, Phillips said that's another matter.

"It seems like if you go out and kill some coyotes, why not leave them where they lay or go out and sell the hides?" he said. "If we saw someone hanging the coyotes, we'd probably ask them to take them down."

Phillips, too, said driving around rural lands, he's often come across coyotes that had been shot and hung on a fence. It's more than likely people showing off, he said.

Phillips said it's legal to hunt coyotes on public land, though the BLM isn't actively involved in enforcing hunting laws, something left to state game and fish officials. He said his agency does sometimes coordinate with the state to prohibit hunting on some lands, such as recreation areas, and it works to promote wildlife habitat.

The Humane Society of the United States, on its website, describes coyotes as having the “unenviable distinction of being the most persecuted animal in North America.”

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