

Nevada to continue allowing dogs during bear hunts

By Martin Griffith, AP

The Nevada wildlife commission has rejected a request by animal rights groups to ban the use of dogs for hunting bears.

The commission, at a meeting Friday in Las Vegas, voted 6-2 to deny the petition filed by six organizations, including NoBearHuntNV, the BEAR League and the Nevada Humane Society.

According to the groups, over half of the states conducting bear hunts have outlawed the use of dogs as being “unsporting” and “unnecessarily cruel” to both bears and dogs.

Dogs used to hunt bears are outfitted with GPS collars, they said, and the hunter waits until the dogs chase a bear into a tree. Dogs can chase bears for seven hours or more, they argued, and dogs can stay with a “treed” bear for up to two days before the hunter shoots the bear out of the tree.

The groups further maintain that bears can still be alive when they fall from the tree, and dogs – which can hunt in packs of up to 20 – can maul bears while they are still alive. Dogs also can be injured by bears in such cases, they added.

“Hunting with dogs has been banned in several states, and it is a disgrace for Nevada to allow this hunting method for bears,” said Beverlee McGrath of Nevada Political Action for Animals.

But commission Chairman Jack Robb of Reno said he believes the use of dogs to hunt bears involves “fair chase,” and that the issues cited by the groups have not surfaced in Nevada.

“At this point, we don’t have anything to support there’s wrongdoing in Nevada,” he told the Associated Press on Sunday.

"I believe the sportsmen here know they're under a microscope, and I believe the sportsmen are really going to police themselves."

Commissioner Scott Raine of Eureka said he believes the use of dogs in bear hunts is "valid" and the concerns raised by the groups are exaggerated.

"To me, it's not a big deal," he said. "There's no legitimate reason not to use them other than it's an emotional deal to some people."

Kathryn Bricker, executive director of NoBearHuntNV, said the animal rights groups support legislation to revamp the wildlife commission so it provides balanced representation for non-hunting interests in wildlife.

"The commission's decision not to hear legitimate arguments on an issue opposed by the majority of Nevadans demonstrates why legislative change to reconfigure the wildlife commission is needed in order to give fair representation to all Nevadans," she said in a statement.

The lone dissenters in the commission's vote were public representative Dr. Karen Layne and conservation representative David McNinch.

The commission plans to consider various aspects of the bear hunt in the future, Robb said.