Op-ed: Watch for Violators During Misguided Crow Hunt

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By Robert Schmidt

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Ethical hunters and wildlife watchers are the first line of defense in protecting Utah's wildlife from poaching and other wildlife-related crimes. Our hard-working conservation officers can't be everywhere, so it is up to us to be their eyes and ears. As wildlife is a public resource, people who violate fish and game laws steal from the rest of us.

The Utah Wildlife Board has approved the state's first American crow hunt. I disagree with the members of the Utah Wildlife Board who voted for this new hunt. In short, American crows are difficult to distinguish from common ravens, complaints that people have about crows in urban areas cannot be resolved with a hunting season and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation discourages the use of wildlife for "trivial" reasons.

But the wildlife board (in a 3-2 vote) has spoken, and the hunt is on. It is now up to those ethical hunters and wildlife watchers to police the crow hunt.

First, there are seasons for hunting crows. (The first one, the month of September, has begun. The next is Dec. 1, 2014 to Feb. 28, 2015). If you see someone shooting crows outside these seasons, it is a poaching violation.

Second, if you know the difference between common ravens and American crows (many people can't tell the two species apart) and you see a person shooting at a raven anytime, it is a poaching violation.

Third, if you see someone hunting crows and not retrieving them, or not making a reasonable effort to retrieve a wounded or dead bird, it is a wildlife violation. It is a wildlife violation to waste or permit to be wasted protected wildlife or a part of protected wildlife. What does this mean? It means a crow hunter is obligated to, well, eat the crow. In addition to the crime of wastage, crows shot with lead bullets or pellets and then left behind are a very real source of lead poisoning to scavenging birds such as vultures and eagles.

There are some special provisions for dealing with nuisance or depredating crows, but let the conservation officers sort these out. If you hunt crows under the upland game provisions, you must follow all hunting laws and regulations.

No ethical hunter would put up with another hunter wasting ducks, pheasants or turkeys. No ethical wildlife enthusiast would accept a "shoot first, identify second" philosophy from hunters. All of us should be concerned about wildlife crimes. If you see one occurring, or hear someone bragging about these crimes, call the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' poaching hotline at 1-800-662-3337. This goes for all wildlife-related crimes, not just ones involving American crows.

This crow hunt stings because it opens more doors for wildlife abuse than for ethical wildlife use. In a state with a strong tradition of science-based wildlife management, the wildlife board's decision was disappointing. Let's hope that the wildlife board "eats crow" in the near future and revisits this ill-conceived hunt.

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