



**NOAA Cownose Ray Scientific Workshop
National Aquarium in Baltimore
October 22, 2015**

My name is Kathryn Kullberg and I am the Director of Marine Wildlife Protection at The Humane Society of the United States. It is encouraging that experts are taking a hard look at the cownose ray to evaluate their need for protection.

The HSUS is concerned that cownose rays are targeted mercilessly in bowfishing tournaments in the Chesapeake Bay. As this workshop aims to evaluate the stock status, population dynamics and the level of protection afforded to this species, these tournaments should be immediately prohibited.

In these contests, participants compete to kill the largest rays using a bow and arrow. Cownose rays and other ray species are targeted and participants are encouraged to kill as many as possible since there are no bag limits. There is no oversight or regulation and tournament participants disrespect these creatures by displaying their kill pile for money and trophies.

Females carrying pups are often targeted as they are larger and heavier. Killing pregnant females is detrimental to the population and incredibly inhumane. As cownose rays have very low fecundity, they take as long as 7 years to reach maturity and give birth to only one pup following a gestation period of 11–12 months. These factors indicate that this species could be particularly susceptible to overexploitation.¹

So-called “wildlife killing contests” have no place in modern wildlife management. Ethical hunting involves fair chase and respect for animals and their habitats. Wildlife killing contests do the opposite: sponsors reward contestants for killing the most or largest animals. Often the bodies of the animals are wasted and treated like trash. Above all, they are ecologically damaging.

Rays are essential to the environment and play an important role in the Chesapeake Bay’s ecosystem. The presence of these intelligent creatures in the Bay can be a good sign for the health of the Bay as their increase can mean that they are finding bottom-dwelling organisms to eat besides the oyster. As these benthic organisms have suffered from poor water quality, this would be a positive indicator for the Bay.²

We hope that this workshop leads to a thorough assessment of this species that will prevent future killing tournaments from taking place in Maryland or Virginia waters. The cownose ray is a beleaguered species native to the Chesapeake Bay that deserves our protection.

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¹ (Bizzarro JJ, Smith WD, Márquez-Farías JF, Hueter RE. 2007. Artisanal fisheries and reproductive biology of the golden cownose ray, *Rhinoptera steindachneri* (Evermann and Jenkins, 1891), in the northern Mexican Pacific. *Fisheries Research* 84: 137-146.

² <http://www.serc.si.edu/education/resources/watershed/stories/cownoserays.aspx>