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THE EXTENSION TRAPPER SYSTEM IN KANSAS

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Kansas has had over nineteen years experience in Extension trapper work. The program in Kansas is unique because it is the only state that has an organized state-wide program that is administered through the State Cooperative Extension Service and where that program is the only form of a governmental predator program in the state.

Missouri and the eastern part of South Dakota have Extension Trapper Systems administered through the state wildlife conservation departments. These states also pay bounties on predatory animals. Kansas does not.

To fully appreciate the Kansas system, it is important to understand the agency that administers the program. Let us briefly review the Cooperative Extension Service, Created by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, Extension is a part of the land grant college in each state and an educational program geared to getting research applied. It is tied to the USDA by means of (1) state acceptance of the Smith-Lever Act, (2) the fact that states match federal money to support the program, and (3) a Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary of Agriculture and the land grant institutions for program administration. County financial support has now evolved because local people support the program and see it as their own. Thus, the Kansas State University Extension Service is a three-way partnership involving, federal, state, and county funds and people.

The Extension Division is the off-campus arm of the Kansas State University, a land grant university functioning through 105 county Extension offices involving over 265 county Extension workers that are backed up by some 175 state and area subject matter specialists. These state Extension subject matter specialists include specialists who have expertise in fields such as agronomy, animal science, nutrition, radio and television, economics, marketing, veterinary science, poultry, forestry, and wildlife, to name but a few. Extension's role is an educational role. We are able to take a team approach to problem solving. Coyote damage control is sometimes a livestock management problem. By being able to work closely with livestock specialists in a team effort the Extension Service gets the job done. To fully understand the Kansas system we need to look back a few years.

Let's look at history for a few minutes. In the early settlement of Kansas as man manipulated and modified the environment to produce essentials for a growing civilization, he encountered problems associated with the activities of natural existing animal populations. Problems arose in wide varieties of situations in Kansas; around homes, on farms, in towns, orchards, crop lands, and range lands.

In those early times anyone could assume the right to kill any wildlife. Fur and game animals were hunted and trapped without restrictions. Nearly all other species, large enough to be noticed, were considered, "varmints," and it was a duty and pleasure to kill them. As game animals grew scarce, states enacted laws to protect them. Management of these game species was placed under the jurisdiction of the state conservation agency, the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission.

Kansas enacted state legislation in 1877 that started a system of bounty payments for the eradication of some animals that were injurious to agricultural crops and livestock. In 1901 legislation was enacted that entrusted the responsibility to Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan to study ways to help farmers and ranchers make the best use of the land and to offer advisory service on how to trap wolves and coyotes and how to poison prairie dogs and pocket gophers.

In 1914 with the creation of the Kansas Extension Division by the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, Extension personnel became involved. Around 1920, a rodent control project was carried out in cooperation with the United States Bureau of Biological Survey, the bureau supplied the salaries for the men employed and the Kansas Extension Service supplied the travel and subsistence expenses. The cooperative plan was discontinued in 1930. The rodent control program was carried out by the county agents, for the most part without specialist assistance. The college Department of Zoology assisted in answering letters of technical nature and in preparation of poison bait. This department also assisted in preparing educational material used in county programs.

In 1940, the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior and renamed United States Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1941 the Extension Service at Kansas State University entered into an agreement with the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, but soon disagreement arose over the funding and management of the project. Under the terms of the agreement, the Extension Service provided more than half of the funds necessary to run the program, but the Fish and Wildlife Service dictated the programs to be conducted. This left the State of Kansas in the position of funding a program over which it had no control. Efforts to resolve these problems failed and the agreement was cancelled. County agents again assumed the responsibility in wildlife damage control with help from agricultural specialists and the college Zoology Department.

The 1949 legislation was enacted and it provided the framework for an Extension wildlife program. Then, in 1953, the Kansas Cooperative Extension Service established a position for a specialist in wildlife management and George Halazon was hired. He began an Extension Trapper System for Kansas in 1953. In some counties in western Kansas the Federal Predator and Rodent Control program was in existence in some years between 1953 and 1967 on a county to county basis without state funds. The chemical 1080 was also used. The bounty enacted in 1877 was still in effect costing an average of $100,000 a year. The bounty was $2.00 per coyote. Cyanide guns and strychnine drop baits were used by many individuals.

In 1968 an appropriation of $15,000 from state funds was made to the Extension Service for the purpose of hiring a person to work on coyote damage control. Soon afterward I was hired and given the responsibilities to develop a program for Kansas. In 1970 by actions in the legislature the bounty was removed. During that same year, the legislature passed a law referred to in Chapter 155, LAWS OF KANSAS 1970, that affected the use of all poisons used against wildlife. The bill provided for a permit to be issued where poisons were to be used in accordance with rules and regulations adopted by the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission. The availability of all poisons has been greatly reduced and the illegal use of poisons is not excessive.

In 1972 the Kansas Livestock Association working with the Kansas Sheep and Wool Growers Association and the Kansas Farm Bureau supported legislation that would have increased the funding for the Wildlife Damage Control program in Kansas so that additional specialists could be employed. The proposed legislation for increasing our staff has good backing and little opposition. To date the bill has not been passed. This is history to date. Now about the program itself.

In Kansas our program is a predator damage control program. It is not a predator control program. No attempt is made to control populations of predators. Our program is an educational effort directed at the goal of reducing livestock losses where possible on individual farms and ranches in Kansas.

A more detailed description of the operations of the Kansas system patterned after Missouri's system can be obtained by writing us for two bulletins, "Controlling Coyote Damage," and "Coyotes in Kansas." Briefly this is how the program works.

The county agricultural Extension agents check out and organize the requests for training service. The producer who has damage may go to these agents just as they go to them for help on other farm problems. After checking the report of livestock loss the county agricultural Extension agent, in many cases, is able to solve the problem by giving instructions in the proper way to set steel traps. In cases of serious or persistent losses he communicates by phone or letter with a full-time secretary who arranges the specialist's schedule. It is important that the individual livestock producer who experiences losses reports those losses quickly and that he receives assistance quickly. One major fault of the Kansas program is that it is understaffed. However, the program has gained wide-spread support, has had good support from county agents and has been successful.

When a date has been scheduled, the Extension specialist meets with the livestock producer. Initially, the specialist usually explains the program. Then he goes through the trapping process, step by step. He shows where to look for coyote sign and where and how to make a good set using steel traps. After placing one set of traps the specialist has the interested producer place another set. Usually 3 to 5 sets are placed. Two Victor 3N traps are used at each set. All demonstrations are made right on the land where damage has occurred or is occurring. The specialist has all the equipment and materials necessary for trapping and this is sold to the producer by the state at cost.

What about the success of the program?. Of the persons who request educational training, 65 percent have been able to stop their losses. The majority use steel traps. Those persons (35%) who fail to stop their losses generally are able to reduce their losses substantially. The Kansas Sheep and Wool Growers Association joined with the Kansas Livestock Association in January 1972 and recognized in a resolution the success of the Kansas Extension Trapper System. Shortly before this action, the Kansas Wildlife Federation, in October 1971, recognized the Kansas Extension Service for its efforts in establishing the Extension Trapper System and presented us with the "Conservationist of the Year" award for 1971.

The promotion of sport hunting of coyotes should be a consideration in any predator damage control program. Kansas people derive many enjoyable hours pursuing the coyote. The coyote is a game animal even if most states refuse to classify him as such. I am seriously considering starting a program whereby coyote hunters can register. They would be given a card identifying them as a Deputy State Coyote Hunter. A small fee could be charged to cover liability insurance and then when a landowner has a surplus coyote population or a killer he can choose to trap the coyotes and/or permit a limited amount of hunting. If he chooses to allow a limited amount of hunting, hunters in that area would then be notified. Coyote hunters in Kansas do livestock producers a good job by concentrating the hunting efforts in troubled areas. The coyote hunter also protects the coyote against the unwise use of poisons.

Kansas is an agricultural state. Kansas ranks 15th in sheep, 4th in beef and 10th in swine production in the United States. We rank 1st in wheat production and sorghum production. As of January 14, 1972 we had a 29% increase in feeder lambs and 3 1/2% reduction in breeding ewes. Sheep are raised on around 3,500 Kansas farms. After a 30-year decline in sheep raising in the United States there is now optimism in the industry. Encouraged by higher price ranges, operators are eager to adapt to more efficient methods of production. Sheep producers in Kansas are going to partial confinement or confinement type management. And many of them are starting accelerated lambing programs in which ewes produce young three times in every two years. This type management reduces losses and increases profits.

The dollar loss owing to predatory animals has decreased considerably in the last 20 years. Some persons might say that the Extension Trapper System is mainly responsible for the decrease, but that is not entirely true. While I think the Extension Trapper System deserves some credit, I feel that the real cause for the reduction is change in management of livestock which of course is encouraged by the Extension Service and recommended by Extension specialists in livestock production. In 1950 it was estimated that predators cost Kansas livestock producers $1,300,000. Eight hundred thousand of that was loss in poultry, mainly chickens. Today poultry production inside buildings or in well-fenced areas greatly reduces the losses due to predators.

Some counties in the state report numerous calf losses while most report none. Most all calf losses involve young cows giving birth for the first time. The causes of many kills remain questionable because of lack of evidence as to cause of death.

Swine production is moving more toward confinement or partial confinement for management reasons unrelated to protection from predators but this type of production cuts down on the availability of swine to predators.

We need some money devoted to research on methods to prevent predator losses. An equal amount of money should be spent on prevention research if any is spent on population control research.

I would like to take this opportunity to suggest consideration of a national program that would reward livestock producers who applied good management practices and so encourage those who do not to adopt better practices. The same program could be used for all types of predator losses. In Kansas, livestock producers practicing good management seldom experience losses from predators. Maybe a national program could pay for 100% of the loss if the producer had met predetermined standards of management, whereas 50% could be paid for losses due to poor management and nothing for losses due to extremely poor management. An Extension trapper could instruct all of the producers in methods to catch predators. Perhaps the program could pay a producer for 50% to 75% of the cost of installation of new equipment such as fences, sheds, lambing pens, etc., or instead lend him money at a low rate of interest in order to help him reduce his losses through proper management techniques.

From 1877 to 1970 the coyote population in Kansas maintained itself and apparently fluctuated normally and independently of bounties. Harvesting the coyote appears to have been and is still well below annual surpluses produced, regardless of whether harvests were for sport, bounty, pelts, or any form of predator control.

The deer population in Kansas continues to increase. Our deer herd increased from only a few deer to several thousand without the benefit of restocking or transplanting, or coyote control. Our bobwhite population sustains harvest yields that approach 3 1/2 million in good years. The coyote population in autumn may be 3 to 5 coyotes per square mile. We have excellent habitat in Kansas that allows game animals and the coyote to live in abundance.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to consider the Extension Trapper System whereby you can help people help themselves. If one man in one state can handle all the wildlife damage problems for 3 1/2 years where there is no coyote population control, never has been and where livestock associations and conservationists alike generally support the program then there has to be some value in that type of program. I believe that any Extension Trapper System should be developed through your state Extension Service, which has a network of employees who work directly with livestock producers. The Extension Service working from land grant universities has the trust of the livestock producers. I agree that state wildlife conservation agencies should have jurisdiction over all resident, native wildlife. State conservation agencies should give serious consideration to placing the coyote on the game animal list.

Livestock producers can handle the responsibilities of caring for their own problems. Do not count all farmers and ranchers in with the few who show no regard for wildlife and the environment. Most farmers and ranchers sincerely desire to have an abundance of wildlife on this land. Farmers are smart, they have to be to stay in business today. You can teach them to control their own losses. The coyote problem in Kansas, as well as anywhere, is an educational problem. The solution is respect for and a better understanding of the coyote in addition to better livestock management.