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COYOTE DAMAGE IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

by Edwin J. Jones 1/

County agricultural agents in all 82 counties of Mississippi and Extension Wildlife Specialists in the other 10 southeastern states were asked to respond to a short questionnaire on coyote damage in their respective county or state. The questionnaire requested the respondents to: 1) indicate if the number of coyote reports have increased, decreased, or remained stable over the last 5 years, 2) indicate the number of reports they were aware of in the last year, 3) report the type of damage and the associated economic loss, 4) estimate the economic loss over the last 5 years, and 5) provide any additional comments.

Forty-six county agents responded to the questionnaire. The number of reports have increased in 37 counties, have remained stable in 5 counties, decreased in 1 county, and no indication from the 3 remaining counties. In counties responding, the average number of reports for the period September 1986 to September 1987 was 20, and the range was 1 to 200. The type of damage and number of counties reporting were: watermelons (31), calves (28), cows (8), poultry (7), dogs (7), sheep (6), goats (5), swine (1), and rural gardens (1). Seven counties have had no reports or complaints of coyote damage. In terms of economic loss the estimated damage was: calves (\$39,950), watermelons (\$17,145), cows (\$8,650), dogs (\$2,100), sheep (\$1,885), poultry (\$430), goats (\$335), swine (\$160), and rural gardens (\$100). Miscellaneous estimated losses were: chewed irrigation pipes (\$30), cattle harassment (\$200), and other crop damage (\$1,555). The total estimated damage was \$72,540.

Other concerns reported by the county agents were the impact of coyotes on wildlife populations, the potential increase in damage as the coyote population increases, and that coyotes are blamed for damage caused by dogs. County agents expressed the need for a bounty. Although these estimates are based on county agent reports, the responses also reflect the perceptions of other agencies involved in coyote damage control.

Responses were received from 8 of the southeastern states. Six states indicated that reports had increased and 2 states indicated that they had decreased over the last five years.

Most of the states indicated that they had a few confirmed reports. The primary problems were associated with calves, sheep, and watermelons. Louisiana and Arkansas indicated that reports have declined. This is probably due to more familiarity with coyotes and preventative measures such as better livestock husbandry practices and the use of electric fences to protect melons.

Although the values reported are rough estimates, it does indicate that coyotes are responsible for considerable damage in the southeastern states. Because the coyote is a relatively recent inhabitant of the Southeast, there is considerable concern about the impact of coyotes on livestock, crops, wildlife, pets, and people. As the population continues to increase, the number of complaints will probably increase until producers learn to use preventative measures.

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