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WHAT'S AHEAD IN PREDATOR MANAGEMENT

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There may not be many things about predators that everyone here agrees upon, but I do believe you all are certain that major changes are about to be made in their management. You all are aware of two recent proclamations of change, the President's Executive Order No. 11643 of February 8, 1972, and the release on the same date of the Report to the Council on Environmental Quality and the Department of the Interior by the Advisory Committee on Predator Control, the so-called Cain Report. Two aspects of predator management are obviously going to be drastically altered if these mandates are carried out, and I'm sure they will be to one degree or another; these are, who is going to do the managing, and how.

When you pause at the top of a pass to see what is ahead, you ordinarily look all around to see just where you are and also maybe look back to reflect on how you got there. I think it worthwhile to spend a little time here looking back because I think we all need to know how we arrived at this threshold of change. Let me give you a backward glance with these 3 policy statements:

a) "We are conservationists who are interested in protecting wildlife and domestic livestock from unnecessary loss. We do not wish to eliminate any species of wildlife nor would such action be condoned. In areas where certain wildlife become predators of domestic livestock and cause loss to livestock producers, measures should be taken to control them. We request that responsible organizations maintain management of predatory animals in the most effective manner."

b) "Basic governmental policy should be one of husbandry of all forms of wildlife. At the same time, local population control is an essential part of a management policy, where a species is causing significant damage to other resources or crops, or where it endangers human health or safety. Control should be limited to the troublesome species, preferably to the troublesome individuals, and in any event to the localities where damage or danger exists."

c) "Animal control is a controversial subject. There are disagreements as to facts, methods of control, need for control and philosophy. Purposes, policies, and practices are not viewed the same by different segments of the public. Our program seeks a balanced approach. We reject the belief that all coyotes, for example, must be exterminated. We reject the other extreme that no coyote should be destroyed, even to protect domestic livestock. We seek effective, warranted control of animals causing significant depredations on livestock or crops or that threaten human health. Elsewhere, when this is not the situation, we seek protection of the species. To say this another way, while condemning the offending individuals, we do not condemn the species."

These policy statements all voice the same basic philosophy of predator management: when predators are causing significant damage, exert sufficient local control of offending animals to suppress the loss, otherwise don't bother them. The first one I read is, and has for years been, the Predator Policy Resolution of the National Wool Growers' Association. The second is the basic tenet adopted by the Secretary of Interior's Advisory Board on Wildlife and Game Management of 1963-64, the Leopold Committee which investigated predator and rodent control in the United States, and is quoted from that Committee's 1964 report. The third quotation is from testimony given before the congressional hearing on predatory mammal control policies, 1966, by Stanley Cain, then Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Dr. Cain was, of course, a member of the 1963-64

Editors note: Because of the great need for exchange of information concerning predator management, I have requested and received permission from the author to include in the Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings this paper presented at the Predator Ecology Symposium held in Orland, California, March 1, 1972.

Predator Advisory Board and the chairman of the 1971 Predator Advisory Committee. He was stating the predator control policy for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and describing that agency's compliance with the 1961 directive up to February, 1966.

So why is there now a second investigation of U.S. predator control? Why a new report and new directives including the most significant recommendations of the new Cain Report that:

1) Federal-State cooperation in predator control be continued but only with general funds appropriated by Congress and State legislatures, no county, livestock association or other local cooperative funding.

2) No poisons be used in predator control and none in rodent control that might secondarily kill predators.

3) The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service do several things: professionalize their field employees, conduct an extension trapper program, conduct research in predator ecology, cost-benefit ratios of predator control, effectiveness of predator control programs, and rabies epidemiology.

The apparent answer is that the 1964 report, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's compliance with its recommendations, or both, just weren't sufficiently satisfactory. Satisfactory to whom? Well, the report was well done, its recommendations did meet approval of responsible conservationists, and the field force within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and their state, county and livestock grower cooperators did try to perform an effective, selective job of predator control within its framework. The program evidently did not satisfy the higher administrative levels of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Interior. Obviously the control program displeased protectionist groups by its continuance of poison use and some of them are opposed to any predator control.

My basis for these statements is that Department of Interior administration did not carry out the salient suggestions of the 1964 Leopold Report, some of which are the same ones now in the 1972 Cain Report. The Leopold Report made 6 recommendations. The first was for the Secretary of Interior to appoint an Advisory Board on Predator and Rodent Control to assess control requests and the opinions of diverse groups regarding specific programs. No advisory board was ever appointed. A greatly amplified research program was called for to find selective and/or non-lethal effective controls. The Service's research program has not been given more than token funding. Strict controls over poison use were suggested but administration continued to vary greatly in different areas. The extension trapper system was suggested for some parts of the country. The name of the control division was changed and the Division did reassess its goals and chart a more selective control policy.

So much for the look back. To look around in our immediate field of view won't take long because all we see are the President's Executive Order and the Cain Report. The Executive Order immediately implements one recommendation of the Cain Report, "to remove all existing toxic chemicals from . . . use for operational predator control." This applies to Federal Lands (except Indian land) and to all Federal programs. The Cain Report recommendation includes another word that I left out; it says ". . . remove all existing toxic chemicals from registration and use" The EPA will soon be deciding that registration question.

Looking ahead, though, what we see immediately is a news release from the Secretary of the Interior dated February 10. It refers to the February 8 Executive Order but goes far beyond toxic chemicals; it says that

"Legislation is being proposed to Congress by Secretary Morton to abolish direct Federal participation in predator control activity and to provide for intensified research to develop safer control methods, and to investigate predatory species fully. This information would be provided to the States. In addition, the proposed bill would provide for a three-year phased period for the States to assume responsibility for animal damage control programs on a matching fund grant-in-aid basis. Until such legislation is passed, the Service will continue to conduct its program without using poisons."

I have been using the simile of going over a pass, not turning a corner nor coming to a fork in the road. I mean that I believe predator management can be more of a downhill pull by simply facing the facts of life regarding it. Some of these are:

1) Nonselective poisons no matter how well-regulated are just not acceptable to a great many people including woolgrowers. They want improved control methods--selective, effective ones--as much as anyone. Probably more so because they would like to protect their livestock without being unfairly criticized; we need new technology.

2) Adequately supported research can provide this technology; let's insist on getting it.

3) The Interior Department can assist with the research but it is not the proper affiliation for conducting operational control programs; it is primarily a conservation agency to which animal control is repugnant and out of place, and it does not direct conscientious, responsive effort to the task.

I can't look ahead and say what will be done, but I can say what I think would be best. There is consensus among all reasonable and informed observers that predator management is required in certain situations. It is equally agreed that where it isn't needed no one cares for it nor wants to pay for it, either in money spent nor wildlife destroyed. There also is unanimous recommendation for such management programs to be conducted by a responsible government agency, not in uncoordinated individual programs. I think the proper administration is from the state level.

Last September the International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners adopted a Predatory Animal Policy Report. It, like other predator policy statements, accepted the need for control to alleviate substantial damage. It also said that in the best interests of the wildlife resource and the public such control programs should be conducted by professionals in a governmental agency, not by individuals suffering real or imagined damage. The policy went into detailed recommendation for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to carry out cooperative programs with states but added that in any state not choosing to accept a federal cooperative animal damage control program this responsibility should be assumed by the state wildlife agency.

The California Department of Fish and Game does not agree and has replied to the Association that in California it is their recommendation that the State Department of Agriculture would be the proper administrative agency. This also is my recommendation for California and for other western states with which I am familiar.

I believe the interests of our wildlife resource and the protection of our livestock industry would best be served with such a state-administered program. It would be familiar with and responsive to the needs of California's industry and resources. It would be able to suggest and guide research efforts for optimum local application. Methods and regulations broad enough to fit the entire United States are not specific enough to exactly fit the requirements of an individual state.

If the federal legislation proposed by the Secretary of the Interior is enacted as described in his news release, there can be a 3-year phasing-in period for a state assumption of total program with Federal funding assistance. In any case, the responsibility for a state program should be planned now, and a very important adjunct to this is the vital need for appropriate research at the state level as well. This need, too, is immediate.