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PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD PREDATORS IN TEXAS

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Abstract: A national survey of public attitudes toward wildlife damage management provided the opportunity to extract a data set from Texas respondents on predator management. Texas respondents were generally more supportive of predator control for livestock protection than the rest of the U.S., although the overall trends were similar. Lethal technologies scored low on a humaneness scale.

A national survey of public attitudes toward a variety of wildlife issues provided an opportunity to explore the attitudes of Texans toward predators. A mail survey was sent to 1,500 randomly selected households throughout the United States. The sample was stratified into 5 regions: Pacific coastal states (AK, CA, HI, OR, and WA), the intermountain west states (AZ, CO, ID, KS, MT, NE, NV, NM, ND, SD, UT, and WY), Texas and Oklahoma, the southeastern states (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, and VA), and the northeastern states (CT, DE, DC, IL, IN, IA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, VT, WV, and WI). Each region received 300 surveys.

The population surveyed was adults (18 years and older) living in a household with a telephone. Six hundred usable surveys were received, including 85 from Texas. Two-hundred surveys were unusable, resulting in an overall participation rate of 47.1%. A telephone survey of 10% of the non-respondents indicated no obvious differences between respondents and non-respondents.

Attitudes and beliefs of respondents from Texas were compared to the respondents from the other 49 states, plus the District of Columbia. Predator management-related questions and responses are summarized below. Means presented below represent the average response on a scale from 1 to 5.

1. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), more Texas respondents believed that it was acceptable to remove predators that prey on livestock ($\bar{x} = 4.0$) than the rest of the U.S.

($\bar{x} = 3.6$) ($p = 0.02$). Asked another way (more generically, i.e., “*Predator control is unacceptable*”), there was no difference in mean response scores between Texas respondents mean response 2.2) and the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 2.4$) ($p = 0.09$). When asked whether predators are a risk that comes with the business of livestock production, there was no difference between Texas respondents ($\bar{x} = 3.4$) and the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 3.5$) ($p = 0.48$).

2. When asked whether it is unacceptable to remove native predators that prey on threatened and endangered species, there was no significant difference between Texas respondents ($\bar{x} = 2.9$) and the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 2.9$) ($p = 0.99$), again using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), more Texas respondents believed that the careful use of poisons was an acceptable method to control wildlife populations ($\bar{x} = 2.5$) than the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 2.2$) ($p = 0.03$), although the overall mean response was negative (i.e., leaning towards “disagree”).

4. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), fewer Texas respondents believed that wildlife population should not be managed by humans ($\bar{x} = 2.1$) than for the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 2.4$) ($p = 0.04$). On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), more Texas respondents enjoyed hunting ($\bar{x} = 3.1$ vs. 2.6 for the rest of the U.S., $p = 0.01$).

5. On a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important), there were no differences between Texas respondents ($\bar{x} = 3.0$) and the rest of the U.S. (3.2).

when asked how important it was that the federal government be involved in controlling predators that threaten livestock ($p = 0.24$). Similarly, there were no differences between Texas respondents ($\bar{x} = 3.1$) and the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 3.2$) when asked how important was it that the federal government be involved in removing animals preying on endangered species ($p = 0.76$).

7 Respondents were asked to rank a variety of wildlife damage management techniques on a humaneness scale, from 1 (not humane) to 5 (very humane). Texas respondents ($\bar{x} = 2.2$) perceived shooting animals from aircraft as more humane than the rest of the U.S. (1.9) ($p = 0.06$), however the mean response was still on the “not humane” half of the scale. For calling and shooting, the Texas respondents’ mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.9$) was the same as the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 2.7$) ($p = 0.26$). Although the mean response was still negative, Texas respondents were more positive ($\bar{x} = 2.7$) than the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 2.2$) on ranking the humaneness of poisons for predators ($p = 0.004$).

8 Texas respondents were very negative toward leghold traps on a humaneness scale, with a mean response score of 1.6, a perception shared by the rest of the U.S. respondents ($\bar{x} = 1.7$) ($p = 0.26$). Neck snares and foot snares followed a similar pattern. Texas respondents were more positive toward human guards and livestock herders on a humaneness scale, with a mean response score of 4.4 compared to a mean response score of 4.1 for the rest of the U.S. ($p = 0.04$).

9 Fertility control ranked high on a humaneness scale with Texas respondents ranking fertility control more humane ($\bar{x} = 4.2$) than the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 4.0$) ($p = 0.05$). Guard dogs also ranked higher for Texas respondents ($\bar{x} = 4.0$) than for the rest of the U.S. ($\bar{x} = 3.6$) ($p = 0.03$).

Texas respondents overall were more supportive of predator control for livestock protection than respondents from the rest of the U.S. However, like the rest of the U.S., Texan respondents were negative toward lethal control techniques for managing predators. Lethal control alternatives such as shooting, poisons, neck and leg snares, and leghold traps were ranked lower on a humaneness scale than non-lethal methods.

These findings may assist decision-makers and managers in both justifying current programs and in developing a sense of how the public may respond to future programs. However, for the most part these are differences in degree of support or opposition, not in the overall preferred direction of wildlife damage policy.

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