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PREDATOR POLITICS IN TEXAS

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The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is certainly one of the most destructive predators affecting the livestock industry, particularly sheep and goats. In fact, title of this session is very appropriate, because when you talk about "politics", coyotes seem to have more politicians working for them than any other animal!

It seems to me that many people who speak up for the coyote don't really know anything at all about the extent of its destructive ways. They don't realize that the coyote takes 15-20% of the sheep and goats lost to predators in the western United States. This amounts to a huge monetary loss to the ranchers affected, not to mention the loss of food and fiber for our nation.

Also, our wildlife are extremely vulnerable to coyote predation. I have seen several research projects where as much as 60% of the fawn crop was taken by predators. Such high levels of predation are obviously a very serious problem to livestock - producers and wildlife managers alike.

What can we do about it? All of us in the livestock and wildlife industries must work together to educate other segments of our population (especially the urban public). They need to recognize the fact that we must be allowed to take some coyotes in order to preserve domestic as well as wildlife species. When you have large livestock and/or wildlife populations, it is impossible to operate profitably with an active coyote population.

I have worked with the sheep and goat industry professionally for the last 40 years, and I have seen the coyote population explode all over the sheep- and goat-raising areas. Areas that were once coyote-free are now overrun with them, and livestock production and the wildlife population in those areas have been hit hard.

When I was a County Agent in the mid-1960s, much of this area had no coyote problem. I think 1 of

the factors that caused the spread of coyotes was the drought of the 1950s. The drought forced many ranchers to get rid of their sheep and goats and some of their cattle, thus nothing was done about predators during that time. When people started re-stocking after the drought broke, the coyotes had become well entrenched.

Another factor in the explosion of the coyote population was President Richard Nixon's 1972 ban on the use of Compound 1080 and sodium cyanide, 2 of the main toxicants used in predator control. At the time these toxicants were banned, it was estimated that 80% of all coyotes removed were taken with sodium cyanide and Compound 1080. So, in one day you might say we lost 80% of our animal damage control.

Shortly after we lost these toxicants, I talked to Congressman Bob Poage about how to pursue regaining the use of the 2 chemicals. He asked me which one would have the fewer people against it, and I said that it would be sodium cyanide for use in the M-44 Device. With Congressman Poage's help, we went to work on regaining the restricted use of sodium cyanide, and we were able to accomplish this in about a year. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) was very helpful in this effort, assisting with re-registration and conducting operator training programs across the state, and in about 3 years the M-44 program was in place again.

Then we went to work on Compound 1080 for use in the Livestock Protective Collar (LPC). After about 5 years, and again with a great deal of help, we were granted a permit for carefully restricted use of Compound 1080 in the LPC. None of this would have been accomplished if it had not been for the hard work, knowledge and experience of Extension predator specialist Dr. Dale Wade, LPC inventor Roy McBride, State Representative Dudley Harrison and a great many Extension, ADC and TDA folks.

Although we were successful in regaining use of

1080 in the LPC and sodium cyanide in the M-44, I do not believe we will be able to reduce coyote numbers to a level of profitability until we are allowed more extensive, although restricted, use of these 2 toxicants. Snares and traps alone will not get the job done with the extremely high numbers of coyotes we have across the sheep and goat raising area of the state today.

Another factor which could prove to be extremely detrimental to livestock producers is the proposed re-introduction of the Mexican wolf (*C. lupus baileyi*) into New Mexico and Big Bend National Park. The mountain lions in the Park have already made huge inroads on the wildlife population, and the coyotes have pushed on into the livestock-producing areas in search of easier, more abundant prey. If the wolves are re-introduced into the Park, they, too, will be hard pressed to find a

"natural" food source, and will also move on. The coyotes will keep expanding their territory as the pressure from the wolves and lions shrinks the food supply.

If this problem is not addressed and resolved satisfactorily, I believe we will see a huge amount of good sheep, goat and cattle country taken out of production by extensive coyote/wolf/lion predation. Seminars such as this one today can go a long way toward educating the public about coyotes and working toward long-term goals of profitable co-habitation of livestock and wildlife with much smaller numbers of predators.

We have no desire to eliminate any species, but we do feel we have the right to make a living from our land. Coyotes rob us of that right just as surely as the thieves who rob our homes and businesses do.