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COYOTES: A SHEEP AND GOAT RANCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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The dictionary defines perspective as "a view of things or facts in relation to other facts and realities".

When asked their views about coyotes and coyote damage, the words used by producers to describe their perspectives and comments are less than kind. It is difficult for a producer to find anything good to say about an animal that has cost him and the sheep and goat industry so much

Most producers will admit that the coyote is smart and cunning; that it is an animal with tremendous adaptability which earns him the respect of producers. They will also admit that the price tag on coyote predation during the past 30 years is probably greater than that of drouth and weak markets combined

The facts pretty well dictate what most sheep and goat producers' perspective on coyotes will be. We see a lot of reports and studies on predation that show numbers of livestock lost, and figures on the economic impact of these losses. Such figures are tremendous, but they are only a small part of the losses hurting production

The figures don't show the loss of years of productive potential, the loss of sheep and goat ranges when producers are forced out of business, the expense of predator control and management practices, the necessity of altering sound ranch management practices and schedules to prevent predation, and they don't show the amount of time lost on predator management

One of the worst losses that a producer must face is the mental anguish of seeing animals that he has raised and cared for, destroyed day after day. Most producers are in the ranching business because it is a way of life that they wish to pursue; they like to see their livestock prosper and do well. They have a large investment in this endeavor and usually see a very small percent return on their investment

When you add up all the losses caused by coyote predation, it is probably the number one barrier to profitable sheep and goat production in Texas

I was raised on a ranch in Pecos County, where my family has raised sheep and goats for over 50 years. During this time, the county has gone from a leader in sheep production to a county that can produce these animals on about 20% of its area. This change is almost entirely a result of coyote predation. The northwestern two-thirds of the county has such large numbers of coyotes today that we probably will never see sheep and goats in that portion of the county again.

These are the facts that shape a producers perspective on coyotes

Another definition of perspective is "from a particular mental point of view". This is a good definition because I know of several producers, trappers and bankers who have developed mental problems because of the coyote

In the past 40-50 years, there has been a rapid transition of the state's population from a rural to an urban way of life. People have moved away from the rural or agricultural point of view, changing their perspective about what goes on around them. This urban movement has made the producer's perspective a small part of the overall picture.

Most producers are devout conservationists. They have to be good resource managers. They are not out to wipe the coyote off the face of the earth. But in the back of their minds, and deep in their hearts, they would like to see the coyote eliminated from that small percentage of the earth where sheep and goats are raised