

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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PREDATOR CONTROL ON FEDERAL LANDS CONTINUING WITHOUT USE OF POISONS

Control of predatory animals on the nation's Federally-owned lands is continuing, although the use of poisons has been banned, Interior Department officials said today.

Trapping, shooting and denning (destroying the young in their dens) are still being carried on by the Fish and Wildlife Service and state, local and private cooperators, they emphasized.

The chief target is the coyote, which many Western sheepmen blame for losses of young lambs. Coyote populations vary across the West, but general agreement exists that some localities have more coyotes than are needed to keep the number of ground rodents, jackrabbits and other small wildlife in reasonable balance with other living creatures.

Use of poisons as a means of predator control was banned by the Administration on February 8 except for special permits for specified situations. Poisoning still can be used as a temporary management tool under Executive Order 11643, if protection of human health and safety, preservation of an endangered species, or the threat of major irretrievable damage to nationally significant natural resources makes poison essential.

Examples of such circumstances include an existing or threatened epidemic of rabies or plague, or a crisis in the survival of a wildlife species threatened with extinction -- if predators are a major factor in the problem, officials said.

The use of poisons has been more effective than any other means of holding down coyote populations. But the side effects have led many Federal officials to conclude that poisons, broadcast widely as a preventive measure against the predatory beast, have become a "cure" that is worse than the "disease" of coyote overpopulation in a number of instances.

Sophisticated poisons and poisoning techniques have killed not only coyotes, but also valuable dogs. People in growing numbers, roaming the back country on public lands -- and especially their small children -- have been in danger, say some game managers. A particularly tricky device is the "coyote getter," which trips into action at a touch, ejecting poison.

Poisoned baits set out for coyotes and other predators have been eaten by "non-target" species, while poisoned bodies, in turn, killed scavenging birds and other creatures that fed on the carrion. Victims have included golden and bald eagles, plus other animals, birds and reptiles that ordinarily help keep the country clean.

Another serious side effect in some areas has been a population explosion of the animals that coyotes would have eaten if there had been enough coyotes around. Field mice, rabbits and other rodents in excessive numbers can be a serious pest to farmers and ranchers.

When these animals proliferated, poisoned grain sometimes has been used to keep their numbers in check. But the poisoned grain has killed highly desirable game birds, including pheasants, bobwhite quail, mourning doves and others, as well as songbirds like the meadowlark.

Interior Department officials noted that recently the Bureau of Land Management had proposed new regulations in the Federal Register that would -- if adopted -- make holders of leases, licenses or permits to graze animals on Federal lands subject to loss or reduction of these privileges if they used poisons in defiance of the new ban.

"There are a lot of rumors about this matter, but it is well to keep in mind two things," said an Interior spokesman. "First, the Executive Order applies only to Federal -- not private or other -- lands. Second, the BLM proposal is only a proposal. It does not take effect automatically. The public is invited to express its views by May 1 in writing to the Director, Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C. 20240. Every comment and opinion will be carefully considered before further action is taken."

As part of its new approach to the subject, the Interior Department also has proposed legislation which would allow interested state governments to take over the Federal predator control role in phases. The proposed bill would authorize Federal grants of up to 75 percent of the costs of each approved State program, or \$300,000, whichever is less, during next fiscal year (1973); up to 50 percent or \$200,000 in fiscal 1974; and up to 25 percent or \$100,000 in fiscal 1975.

To be approved, a state program also would ban use of poisons, but trapping, shooting and denning would be allowed. Exceptions to the ban on poisons could be made under the same special conditions as those spelled out in the Executive Order of February 8.

In addition, there would be an expanded Federal research effort to learn more about control and conservation of predatory animals.

Federal Fish and Wildlife Service officials acknowledge that trapping, shooting and denning have killed fewer coyotes than poisons in recent years. But many of them contend that the use of non-poisonous controls, although it takes more time, can be more effective in reducing livestock losses. Usually, they say, the trouble is caused by one two or a few rogue predators. Once these target animals are eliminated, similar problems may not arise again for years.

"In some states, the coyote is treated as a game animal," one official observed. "He can be just about as wily to track and elusive to shoot as a fox. Sportsmen ought to consider the possibility. If enough people in a state agree on it, the effort could be promoted on a trial basis at first, with good hope of success."

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