

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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ANDRUS ANNOUNCES REVISED FEDERAL POLICY ON PREDATOR CONTROL

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today announced a revised Federal policy on the control of damage to livestock caused by predatory animals, primarily coyotes, in the West.

The policy emphasizes increased research into non-lethal control methods along with continued use of existing, effective techniques against the offending predatory animal or local population causing the damage.

"Predators play an essential role in the natural environment," Andrus said. "But to some Western livestock raisers the problem can be a source of major economic hardship. It is clear that we must find ways to better assist the sheep industry in reducing losses in an environmentally acceptable manner.

"We believe these policy changes, along with additional funding and personnel, will reduce both livestock losses and harmful effects of the predator control program on wildlife," Andrus said.

Both the livestock industry and environmentalists have been critical of the present program.

The policy decision followed a comprehensive 21-month review of the Federal role in controlling damage by predators. The study was initiated after Western livestock interests asked for additional and more effective controls to reduce losses which had reached high levels in recent years.

The major points of the revised policy are as follows:

--Continued use of some existing techniques which have proved effective with appropriate restrictions. Aerial gunning would be permitted, particularly in pursuit of offending animals. The use of the M-44, a selective poison device, would also be continued since it will work at times and in places where other techniques are ineffective. Trapping would continue as a major control method while research proceeds on improved trapping tools and techniques.

--Elimination of the controversial practice of denning (killing coyote pups while they are still in the den).

--There will be no further research or development of potential uses of Compound 1080. However, research may be continued on other toxicants that do not have secondary effects, are selective and humane.

--Increased field research on non-lethal control techniques and the effectiveness of various husbandry practices in reducing livestock losses. This would include further research into scare devices, aversive agents, fencing, and other methods.

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--Use of preventive control only when other techniques have been found to be ineffective or impractical. Preventive control would be limited to specific situations where unacceptably high losses have been documented during the preceding 12 months.

--Greater emphasis on extension programs conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, land grant universities, and county extension agents. The extension approach involves conducting practical demonstrations and disseminating information so that livestock owners themselves can apply animal damage control techniques.

--Establishment of a Research Advisory Committee. The Committee will include representatives of the livestock industry, the environmental community, academia, Council on Environmental Quality, Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. It will assure that new ideas are given attention and oversee the performance and application of research efforts. A five-year research program will be drawn up, and research funding increased.

--Establishment of an interagency working group comprising representatives of the Federal land managers -- BLM, FS and the Fish and Wildlife Service -- to develop an implementation program for the new policy on the public lands. Livestock grazing occurs on both BLM and FS land, and to a much smaller degree on FWS lands.

Sixteen of the 17 Western States have animal damage control programs which are either conducted, funded, or administered by the Federal Government. Kansas has a state-financed extension program. Last year, 70 percent of the damage control effort was for sheep; 26 percent for cattle; and 4 percent for poultry and other livestock.

Use of toxic chemicals for predator control was banned on public lands in Federal programs by Executive Order in 1972. Since then, animal damage control methods have consisted of trapping, aerial and ground shooting, denning, snaring, and, since the Executive Order was modified in 1975, the M-44 cyanide device (a baited, spring activated ejector that expels poison into the mouth of the predator pulling on it). The M-44 device is a highly selective technique and is the only predator poison currently approved for animal damage control.

In 1977 the President's Environmental Message outlined broad policy guidance for the animal damage control program. The studies subsequently undertaken and the decisions made today are in furtherance of that policy.

Because of the many complex issues and conflicting public interests involved in predator control, Secretary Andrus made his decision only after a long period of study and comment by a broad range of organizations and individuals who were given ample opportunity to express their views.

The policy review began in January 1978 with a comprehensive study of the problem and the appointment of a broadly based Secretarial advisory committee to oversee the study and resulting report. The committee consisted of representatives from the livestock industry, conservation and environmental organizations,

universities, and State and Federal officials, which reflected the various viewpoints on the issue of animal damage control, including the view that the Federal program should be restricted to non-lethal controls, particularly on public lands.

An environmental impact statement was also prepared during the period. In all, a total of 10 public hearings and open meetings were held across the country and numerous written comments were received on the draft and final versions of the study report and the environmental impact statement.

Andrus based his decision primarily on information derived from the study, Predator Damage in the West: A Study of Coyote Management Alternatives, completed in January 1979; the Environmental Impact Statement, completed in June 1979; and a report by the Department's Office of Audit and Investigation, Review of the Animal Damage Control Program--USFWS, November 1978.

Andrus said he had carefully weighed all of the alternatives in light of important environmental considerations and the Department's responsibility for controlling damages caused by wild animals and for conserving wildlife and natural resources.

The alternatives presented for Andrus' consideration included having no Federal program, transferring it from Interior to the Department of Agriculture, operating it on a contract basis with the States, compensating ranchers for livestock losses caused by predators, or reducing the coyote population generally throughout the area.

Other alternatives addressed the major issues of lethal versus non-lethal control methods (aversives, repellents, etc.) and the selectivity of the various methods in affecting only the specific species or more particularly, the "offending" animal actually killing livestock. The issue of whether these controls should be preventive or corrective also was included.

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