

PREDATORS ARE A LIABILITY: HOLDING BACK THE TIDE

KELLY GILL, J.D., Predator Control Systems, Post Office Box 3679, Abilene, Texas 79604

Abstract: A goal we could all comfortably support is a balanced ecosystem with optimal and simultaneously existing numbers of predator and prey species: livestock, wild ungulates and predators in equilibrium. But is that goal realistically attainable? The probability of successfully achieving such a goal is akin to the likelihood that our thirty year war on drugs will soon interdict 99% of all banned substances at our borders. In other words, those advocates of using only nonlethal means of coyote and predator control are engaging in politically palatable rhetoric when they espouse such a notion, but in reality coyotes and other predators pose a continuing and increasing threat to our livestock and wildlife resources. Without the experienced use of regular, lethal control and management measures, the predators will rule, and we will all be wondering why we didn't act sooner and more aggressively.

One of the greatest pillars connected solidly to the foundation and formation of this nation is the concept of private property rights intertwined with individual freedom and liberty. The Preamble of our Constitution begins with "We the people" and not "We the government" or "We the bureau of we know best." The concept developed by the framers of the Constitution was that the individual citizens would give certain powers to the federal and state governments, but retain all other powers and freedoms.

So what, might you ask, does a political science topic have to do with predators generally, and coyotes specifically? Well, more than you might think. We should not separate the concepts of individual freedoms and private property rights from an equal right and power to protect these freedoms, our property, and, for that matter, a way of life that is rich in history, productivity and virtue. As ranchers, landowners, homeowners, hunters, stock farmers, pet owners, and wildlife

managers, we should all jealously guard the right to protect against pests and predators alike.

Volumes of scientific evidence support the proposition that some form of continuing predator management is beneficial to livestock, pets and wildlife. Just as coyotes are destructive and costly in the calving/lambing pasture, they are similarly harmful to proper recruitment ratios for important game animals such as whitetail and mule deer, pronghorn (antelope), wild sheep, and all of the exotics from the deer, sheep and antelope families.

"Eradication" of coyotes is now such a remote possibility as to be foolish to discuss seriously. "Control" is a concept nearly as unlikely, what with the historical and continuing limitations on effective chemicals and toxicants. So we are left with the concept of "Management" of coyotes and other predators. Without the bear and the wolf in Texas for almost a century now, man is the only effective

“manager” remaining who can confront, deal with, and hopefully hold back the onslaught of the coyote.

Our own Parks and Wildlife Department has, during recent years, spent significant sums of our tax dollars to promote the economic benefits derived from the hunting of whitetail deer, antelope and turkey as a major resource for landowners, ranchers and stock farmers who are besieged by rising costs, product price declines, and weather problems. Should we now allow this investment to be substantially eroded by the coyote and those liberal ideological groups who seek power and control over vast areas of private land under the guise of “their version” of the public good translated to mean no lethal control of coyotes or other predators? Do we accept their concept of which animals are deemed to be worthy of political protection: e.g. mountain lions, wolves, grizzly bears, coyotes, etc.? Do we allow our rights of protection to be eroded in the face of rising and plentiful predator numbers? Would any policy that called for the killing of predators ever be acceptable to these ideological groups?

The coyote, as an opportunistic carnivore, has a high degree of adaptability to a changing environment including dietary variation, litter size, habitat accommodation and geographic migration. While coyotes have dramatically expanded their range during the last century, many of our control or management techniques have been eliminated, withdrawn, or substantially inhibited by political pressure and budgetary constraint. We can co-exist with coyotes with some continuing management efforts, sometimes aggressive, sometimes more conservative, but there is no basis of data

available for what would happen if all efforts of control, under our current environment, were discontinued except the age old population boom and crash scenarios. By hypothesis, if we were to allow the coyote population to rise to a crash level, we would, in all likelihood, be shocked at the decimated livestock and wildlife populations immediately preceding the crash of the coyote population by some natural phenomenon, i.e., disease and starvation.

Continual predator management techniques including trapping, snaring, aerial gunning, denning, toxicants and limited use of guard animals, when used in conjunction with sound animal husbandry, wildlife management, fencing, and habitat enhancement are the bases for successfully exercising prudent stewardship over livestock and wildlife resources. To do less is to huddle in the buildings and peer out at the interlopers scaling the walls.

We need not “blame” coyotes for merely doing what they have trained for millions of years to do and do well. But the blame lies with us if we abdicate power and control over these vital predator issues to those promoting nonlethal or no control of coyotes and other predators. The coyote is not an evil enemy, but those who would elevate the interests of the coyote over the enjoyment and economic uses of both livestock and wildlife are certainly posing a grave danger to a longstanding way of life. Thus, this opportunistic carnivore who has been accused of using a badger to perform the more difficult partnership role of setting up his prey, may now find himself aligned with a much more clever and well financed partner of the two-legged variety. Trap the coyotes and keep vigilant watch for his partner.