

## **PREDATORS ARE AN ASSET: THE CASE AGAINST PREDATOR CONTROL**

**DEDE ARMENTROUT**, Mountain Lion Foundation of Texas, 1715 Horton Preiss Road, Blanco, TX 78606; email: dede@mountainlions-texas.org

***Abstract:*** Predators eat prey, so if you want to increase prey, reduce predators. That's the theory. It usually doesn't work. Predator control is a uni-dimensional approach to a multi-dimensional problem. Predator control doesn't work when other factors are limiting prey survival or prey reproductive success, when offending predators are not removed, and/or when control fails to counter predator immigration and predator reproductive response. A better approach in prey management is to determine what factors are limiting the prey species. Often reducing direct competition and enhancing habitat will work much better than predator control. Removing predators without considering the impact of that removal may exacerbate problems rather than solving them. Poor or insufficient habitat is one of the most common limiting factors for many wildlife prey species. Without good habitat, predation is merely one expression of compensatory mortality. Poor habitat can be described as habitat that does not contain the appropriate quantity or quality of food, shelter, water and microhabitats such as places to escape for thermoregulation or concealment. Poor habitat may also lack some other component needed for optimum reproductive sustainability such as symbiotic species. In some cases prey are vulnerable due to their own success. Too much success in a finite habitat can lead to epidemic disease, starvation, increased parasitism, vitamin deficiencies, and crowding-related stress that reduces fitness and diminishes further reproductive success. Before embarking on a program of prophylactic predator control, the livestock or wildlife manager would be better advised to optimize habitat and survey the factors limiting their target species' success.

---