

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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Testimony of  
**BOBBY ACORD**, Deputy Administrator  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Before the House Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans  
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I would like to thank the Subcommittee for having me here today to talk about the Animal Damage Control (ADC) program's efforts to deal with predation problems here in the West. I don't need to tell any of you that these are challenging times for the farming and ranching community; this hearing is an excellent opportunity to discuss what ADC has been doing to lessen predation problems and explore ways to improve upon the services we provide. With me today are Mr. Mike Worthen, our Western Region Director, Mr. Rick Phillips, our State Director for Wyoming, and Mr. Guy Connolly of our Denver Wildlife Research Center's Predator Division. After presentation of my statement, we would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

### History and Orientation of the ADC Program:

I would like to begin by providing some basic background on the ADC program and the reasons for its existence. The ADC program was established more than 65 years ago in response to requests for assistance in preventing livestock depredation by wild animals. Over time, the program has grown to address the damage that wildlife can cause to crops, natural resources, facilities and structures, and human health and safety. Each year, we respond to about 100,000 requests for assistance in stemming hundreds of millions of dollars in losses. Underlying the ADC program is a fundamental principle: that our Nation's wildlife is held in trust for all Americans. It is a publicly owned resource. Nevertheless, the government has a responsibility to help limit in the most responsible way possible the serious damage that can be caused by wildlife.

We recognize that wildlife has economic, recreational, and aesthetic values for all Americans. Our mission is to provide Federal leadership in managing problems caused by wildlife. We use an integrated management approach to prevent or minimize wildlife conflicts with humans and agriculture. This approach involves integrating and applying practical, safe, effective, and biologically and environmentally sound methods of prevention and control. Nonlethal methods--like guard dogs, exclusion devices, and improved husbandry practices--are an important component of these efforts, but, unfortunately, they are not feasible in all situations. This is particularly true out here in the West, where lethal methods are often the only practical way to resolve the problems.

### Predation in the West

Quantifying and putting a dollar value on total losses to predation can be difficult. Therefore, to obtain estimates of the range and extent of wildlife damage across the country, we began contracting with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) in 1989. That year, NASS took a survey to assess total levels of wildlife damage experienced by farmers and ranchers across the country. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed reported experiencing wildlife damage. We contracted with NASS to conduct a similar survey again last year. The percentage of farmers and ranchers that reported experiencing wildlife damage was up to about 60 percent, and the dollar value of those damages was placed at \$611 million--up \$150 million from the previous survey.

In 1990 and 1994, we asked NASS to survey sheep and goat producers across the United States to determine the extent of wildlife predation on sheep. The results indicated that, nationwide, predators caused about \$27.4 million in losses for the sheep and goat industries in 1990 and about \$23.2 million in losses in 1994. Of all predators, coyotes were the

main cause of losses.

In the 1994 survey, NASS asked each producer how much they spent on predator control. On average nationwide, producers spent \$1.77 per breeding animal on nonlethal methods and \$0.50 per breeding animal on lethal methods. By comparison, here in Wyoming, producers spent \$2.92 per breeding animal on nonlethal protection and \$1.57 per breeding animal on lethal protection.

Similar survey methods were used by NASS in 1992 to estimate the impact of wildlife predation to the cattle industry. Survey results indicated that predators cause about a \$41.5 million annual loss to that industry, with coyotes responsible for about 59 percent or \$24.3 million of the total loss.

### **Program Structure:**

I'd like to talk briefly now about how the ADC program is structured to deal with these problems. First, I want to point out that Federal dollars are just one source of funding for ADC efforts. We enter into cooperative, cost-share agreements with States, counties, organizations, and even individual producers in areas where damage is occurring. Total Federal funding for operational or direct control is currently a little over \$21 million, with an additional 9.7 million for ADC methods development; our cooperators nationwide contribute another \$23 million in direct control activities. And I want to point out that cooperators have taken on an increasing share of the responsibility; just by means of comparison, in 1991, cooperator contributions for direct control totaled about \$16.4 million.

Our program is divided into an eastern and a western region, and, as you can imagine, the problems and the solutions are very different in each. In the East, where a lot of the wildlife damage has been to field crops, aquaculture, and urban resources, the program has historically focused on technical assistance. What this means is that our State offices provide advice and guidance on methods that producers and others can actually implement themselves. In many of these States, our cooperators--usually State or county governments--often pay 100-percent of the operational costs for ADC assistance.

But I would note that we are beginning to increase direct control activities in the East, as coyotes are increasingly causing the same kinds of damage as here in the Western States. We have new predator control projects in Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia. In fact, West Virginia just became the first State east of the Mississippi to hold a registration for the Livestock Protection Collar.

Here in the West, our activities have traditionally been more hands-on, and our western region has received \$15.8 million of the available \$21 million in Federal funds for FY 1996. About \$1 million goes to Wyoming, and cooperators--which include 17 of the 22 counties and the Wyoming Department of Fish and Game--contribute another \$427,000. Needless to say, a coordinated approach to damage control and management by all affected interests and agencies is vitally important, and we have excellent relationships with the land management agencies in this part of the country.

### **Predation in Wyoming:**

Although our ADC State office in Casper reports damage to crops, pasture, buildings, and even electrical utilities, most wildlife damage in this State relates to livestock. While many problems are caused by black bears, bobcats, red foxes, golden eagles, ravens, and turkey vultures, the overwhelming majority of predation is by coyotes. In 1994, we killed 5,302 coyotes to help stem that damage. I might add that private individuals killed another 5,088 coyotes.

When dealing with the level of damage experienced by producers here in Wyoming, nonlethal methods like guard dogs can help prevent some problems, but only in conjunction with actually reducing the number of damage-causing animals. The methods we use to remove damage-causing animals here in Wyoming and other parts of the West include trapping, shooting--including aerial hunting--denning, and the M-44 device. APHIS' goal is to solve animal damage problems by emphasizing a program mix that is both cost-effective and environmentally sensitive.

In 1994, the Wyoming Agricultural Statistics Service surveyed sheep producers to get a complete picture of predation problems. The results indicate that, in 1994, a total of 96,000 sheep and lambs (before docking) were lost to predation

out of an estimated total population of 790,000. That's \$4.3 million or 12 percent in losses to this State's sheep industry. And the survey indicated that 72 percent of those losses are attributable to coyotes.

### **Customer-Service Orientation of the Program**

ADC began many years ago as a customer-service program, and we maintain that orientation today. To quantifiably assess the overall effectiveness of the service we provide, last year we conducted a nationwide customer service survey of those requesting assistance. We are very proud of the results, which include the following:

- 95.6 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that, "ADC personnel made me feel that my wildlife problem was important."
- 94.9 percent agreed that, "ADC personnel knew what to do to solve or control my wildlife problem."
- 96.7 percent agreed that, "The service that ADC provides is useful."
- 94.1 percent believe that, "Without ADC's help, the level of loss, damage, hazard, or nuisance would have increased."

### **Environmental Compliance**

As I stated earlier, ADC is committed to stopping wildlife damage in a manner that is not only effective but also environmentally responsible. All of our activities are conducted in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and other Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.

Just about 2 years ago now, we completed a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for our program as a whole. The EIS examined 13 alternatives and provided detailed analysis of 5 of them. It focused on the types of wildlife species affected, losses associated with wildlife damage, societal views or attitudes, and impacts on biological, economic, and physical aspects of the human environment. Because aspects of all 13 alternatives have been or could be used in ADC activities, depending upon the particular area or the specific nature of the damage problem, our final decision was to direct our local managers to consider any and all of the 13 alternatives as a possible approach.

Our goal is flexibility. We don't want to dictate which alternatives are the most appropriate for a given area; we leave that decisionmaking largely up to our managers in the field. These are the people who are in contact every day with our customers and are in the best position to identify appropriate and workable solutions.

### **Research**

At this point I'd like to mention a very important component of the ADC program, and that is our laboratory, the Denver Wildlife Research Center. This laboratory has been in existence since the 1920's and is the only laboratory in the world devoted exclusively to the study of wildlife damage control. We not only conduct our own research there, but we also contract with universities, non-profit research facilities, and other public and private entities. The goal is to make good use of state-of-the-art technology and the most modern advances to:

- assess damage and other problems caused by wildlife;
- investigate the biology and behavior of problem animals;
- evaluate the impact of wildlife management practices on target species, nontarget species, and the environment;
- develop and improve technology to reduce wildlife problems;
- support registration of management chemicals and drugs; and
- transfer scientific and technical information.

Much of DWRC's work focuses on identifying new control techniques and refining existing ones to make control efforts not only more effective but also more acceptable to the general public. Some of the folks here today from the ranching community may be familiar with one of the tools our researchers have developed, and that is the Electronic Guard. This is a siren-and-strobe frightening device that is being used as a component of an integrated approach to wildlife damage. We have done extensive studies in the past on the effectiveness of guard dogs and are now branching out to study the use of llamas and burros in protecting sheep from predators.

DWRC researchers are also continuing work--funded in part by the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association--on the possible use of immunocontraceptives in coyotes. We are working on refinements on traps--including not only padded jaws but also remote monitoring technology that lets our specialists know when a trap has been sprung and tranquilizer tabs for animals that are trapped.

**Conclusion:**

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for bringing us together today to discuss ADC, and I hope my testimony has been helpful in giving you a sense of our commitment to providing good service. We would be happy to work with you to provide more detailed information if that will be helpful. And, of course, we'd be happy to answer any questions you may have now.

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