

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony of

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Kemmerer, Wyoming

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Truman Julian, President of the Wyoming Wool Growers Association and the National Public Lands Council. I represent approximately one thousand active sheep producers in Wyoming and about 27,000 public land permittees nationally.

Since January of 1993, the sheep industry in Wyoming has lost over 500 active lamb and wool producers with a corresponding reduction of over 255,000 head of our producing ewe base. Nationally we lost approximately 2.5 million head of sheep or 22% from 1990 - 1995. Most have been sold for slaughter, most likely in Mexico.

To put this into economic terms, our national organization, the American Sheep Industry Association, estimates that every producing ewe in this country generates conservatively \$600,00 in annual economic activity with the products she produces (lamb and wool) and she creates or maintains .031 jobs. What the loss of 255,000 head of producing animals in the State of Wyoming means to this state and to the American economy is a LOSS of \$153 million in economic activity and over 7900 jobs. That economic activity and those jobs are now being picked up by our foreign competitors. You may notice, coincidentally, that the decline in both Wyoming sheep and producer numbers coincides with the passage of the act by Congress to eliminate the Wool Incentive program. This is not a coincidence, but I am here to tell you that the action Congress took in 1993 to eliminate the 50 year old Wool Program IS NOT the only reason we have seen 33% of our producers and 32% of our production base leave the business, or the state.

Since the fall of 1993, the Executive Board of the Wyoming Wool Growers Association has conducted a series of town meetings throughout the state. These meetings have several functions, first of all to inform producers of the latest issues that are important to the sheep industry both at the state and national levels. These subjects have included such topics as the loss or elimination of the Wool Incentive Program and the more recent industry referendum to establish a lamb check-off system. In addition, these meetings are designed to gather input on the main concerns of Wyoming sheep producers and to attempt to address these concerns. In Wyoming, we not only attempt to keep our producers well informed of sheep industry issues, but try to work towards solving problems that plague our sheep producers.

Congresswomen Cubin and Committee members, guess what the sheep producers in Wyoming have indicated is their number one problem over the past three years? Yes, predators! I am not going to bore you with facts, figures and statistics, but instead have included them for the record and for your review in my written testimony. I might add though, that according to the Wyoming Agricultural Statistics Service, predators have cost sheep producers in Wyoming almost four million dollars annually over the past three years. This cost, plus the loss of the Wool Act, which accounted for approximately 24 percent of the sheep producers income, have brought about the decline of the sheep industry in Wyoming and the West.

On our ranch (we are a family corporation), predators cost us directly over \$30,000 per year, on the average. Losses have ranged from a high of 22% to a low of 10%, averaging about 15% yearly. This amounts to about \$30,000 a year loss, depending on prices. The wool incentive amounted to 26% of our annual income. The combined value of these two losses amounts to about \$180,000 per year, again depending on prices of lamb and wool.

On our operation, coyotes are the number one predator followed by fox, black bear, ravens, eagles, mountain lions and an occasional loss from badger and bobcats. Soon, perhaps as early as this summer, I will be facing the wolf. The wolf

found dead near Daniel, Wyoming several months ago was only 50 miles north of our summer grazing allotments. It seems the wolves that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service transplanted into Yellowstone National Park are getting tired of elk and buffalo steak and are seeking greener pastures. I will address the wolf problem later in my testimony.

Let me assure you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, that despite what some environmental and animal rights activists groups would have you believe, we are not sitting on our backsides complaining about predators and doing nothing about the problem ourselves. Myself, as well as almost all other sheep producers in Wyoming, have tried everything available to reduce predator losses. The following is what we have tried and are doing on our ranch. We have at one time or another used fire, fire crackers, repellents, predator ear tags, scare devices, sterilization, herding, sleeping with the herd, trapping, flying, M-44's and guard dogs. Some of these tools were worthless and expensive, while others were useful.

Last year, we spent over \$5,000 in predator taxes, \$4,500 for aerial gunning, over \$2,000 for a private trapper, and over \$4,500 for dog food and supplies. We furnished a horse for a trapper and provided horse feed and pasture. This adds up to approximately another \$20,000 per year, which takes my overall predator cost to about \$50,000 per year. It is added expenses such as these that are causing us to lose a wonderful industry in Wyoming and much of the West.

Committee members, let's go back to the wolf. As you are aware, wolves were introduced into Idaho and Yellowstone Park last winter. As you have probably heard they are not staying in the Park. I would like to present to you some facts presented by Elaine Allestad in testimony given before the United States Senate, Subcommittee on Park, Historic Preservation and Recreation on May 23, 1995.

I quote, "If it can be said the bald eagle represents the successes of the Endangered Species Act, then it can also be said that the wolf best represents the Endangered Species Act's failures and abuses. Foremost among these abuses is the fact that the gray wolf is not in danger of extinction. Canadian biologists estimate there are between 45,000 and 60,000 wolves in Canada. Over two thousand gray wolves are found within the continental United States and another 7,000-10,000 gray wolves are found in Alaska. The wolf issue is not about recovery of a threatened species. Nor is this issue about biology. The wolf issue centers around regulatory control of natural resources. The issue also centers around the misguided policies of natural regulation.

The Eastern timber wolf recovery program has taken an enormous toll on the livestock industry, and agriculture in general, in northern Minnesota. According to USDA figures, there were 12,230 farms and 91,000 sheep in the Minnesota wolf range in 1979. By 1982, the number of farms in Minnesota wolf range declined 41 percent to 7,200 farms. By 1986 sheep numbers in Minnesota wolf range declined 82 percent to only 16,000 sheep. This decline in sheep numbers in wolf range occurred when sheep numbers in the rest of the state increased.

Between 1977 and 1986, an average of 234 domestic animals were verified as lost to wolves in Minnesota. From 1987 to 1991 this annual average increased to 1150 domestic animals, five times the number lost during the previous period. The year 1989 was extremely bad for predation with 1,734 confirmed livestock losses. The state of Minnesota compensated livestock producers \$43,644 for their losses to wolves, but by February 1990 the compensation program was broke. The federal government and organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation did not provide additional funds to the compensation program and many producers had to wait until the next fiscal year to receive payment. Since 1989, wolf predation levels have remained high.

In 1992, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a report entitled "Trends and Management of Wolf / Livestock Conflict in Minnesota." In earlier reports, USFWS analysts found that livestock predation was statistically insignificant. However, heavy wolf predation losses in 1987, 1989 and 1990 forced the USFWS to modify earlier conclusions. USFWS's updated data concluded that livestock losses increased with time and distribution. The USFWS report suggested that preventative wolf control measures be taken in Minnesota. The report also states that up to 30 percent of the Minnesota wolf population will have to be taken annually to prevent increased conflict. The USFWS has not taken action on this report and is unlikely to do so considering the environmental communities' uproar created during Alaska's wolf control efforts. Most disturbing is the report's conclusion that because factors in Minnesota are different than in the West, the West can expect even heavier livestock losses than those experienced in Minnesota."

In a recent conversation with the USFWS concerning wolves, I asked whether our existing predator management

program in livestock areas outside the Park would be affected if wolves decided to look for greener pastures. I was told, "Yes". Currently, county predatory animal trappers, private animal damage control and ADC use the following tools to manage predators. Devices such as snares, traps, calls and aerial gunning are used as well as denning and M-44's. Not any one of these tools is effective on their own, a combination is needed to assure effective control of predators. I was told by USFWS that if a wolf showed up outside the Park, for example in my area which is about 100 miles south of Yellowstone, that M-44's and snares would definitely be affected and probably leg-hold traps and possibly aerial hunting. Tell me, Committee members, what methods of management do we have left? What am I and other livestock operators to do but go out of business. Can we not learn something from Minnesota?

My Grandfather immigrated from England and started our ranch in the 1880's. My children are the fourth generation of Julians engaged in the sheep ranching business in Southwestern Wyoming. My father is still alive, so counting my two new grandchildren, this original old sheep ranch is being worked and is supporting four generations of Julians. It is my will and desire to have a Julian sheep ranch for another 116 years. The big question, is will the U.S. Government allow us to survive?

Look at the Grizzly bear in Wyoming. They have reached their population objective to be delisted. Have they been? The answer is No! The grizzly is costing the State of Wyoming thousands of dollars a year for depredation losses. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department wants to delist them and be allowed to hunt bears that are harmful to humans and depredate on domestic livestock. This makes good sense to me but does it to the USFWS? Why of course not, it is too practical.

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, I rest my case. Please give the testimony I have given here today serious consideration and analyze the data I have presented in writing. If the sheep industry is to survive in Wyoming and much of the West, we need your help. The laws that were passed such as the T&E Species Act whose intent was well founded and meaningful, are now being used by some Government agencies and this Administration to beat up and drive it's own citizens out of business. Thank you for your time, consideration and the opportunity to give testimony.

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