
Issue:

The SD Department of Game, Fish & Parks is restructuring its animal damage control program by rearranging the workload of trappers. This is being prompted by budget cuts and an attempt to use current resources more efficiently. Livestock owners, particularly sheep owners, are concerned that the changes will reduce the effectiveness of GF&P's coyote control efforts.

Background:

South Dakota is unique among states in that the state (through the Department of Game, Fish & Parks) responds to predator and pest animal damage complaints, rather than these complaints being handled by the USDA. The program is funded by USDA, county contributions based on livestock census numbers, and the state GF&P. The GF&P provides a 2:1 match of county funds, using money from the sale of hunting licenses. The annual county and GF&P total averages slightly more than \$1.6 million per year.

Last year a cooperative agreement was signed with USDA Wildlife Services to make the federal funding part of USDA's annual operating budget instead of an annual earmark. The level of federal funding is slated to decline, from approximately \$600,000 in FY 06, to \$402,000 in FY08, to an estimated \$190,000 in FY09.

Because of funding constraints, and because of the cyclical nature of trapper workloads throughout a typical calendar year (for example, livestock depredation complaints are typically highest during spring lambing and calving), GF&P is realigning the duties of trappers.

Four existing game animal damage positions and 19 existing trapper positions are being combined and reclassified into "Wildlife Damage Specialist" positions. Their job will be to provide depredation assistance to "critical complaints" involving livestock depredation. Less time will be spent on predator control efforts not directly associated with livestock depredation complaints, and more time will be spent on game animal depredation management, and general game, habitat, and other private lands management and hunter access activities.

In addition to government-funded efforts, livestock owners within a county may organize a Predator Control District. If the owners of the majority of the livestock within a county agree, the County Commission may assess a special property tax of up to twenty-five cents per head for sheep and six cents per head for cattle. The levy may be doubled if approved by a vote of livestock owners. The district may hire employees, bounty predatory animals, make contracts, and enter into agreements with federal, state, or local government agencies.

There are about eight organized predator control districts; only about half are active.

SD Farm Bureau Policy:

Game, Fish & Parks

We encourage the SD Game, Fish & Parks to act more landowner-friendly by:

- consulting with landowners regarding game problems,
- consulting with landowners regarding hunting access,
- providing transferable licenses, coupons for landowners, etc.
- adequately funding depredation programs.

GF&P shall compensate farmers and ranchers for game depredation. We also support issuing transferable depredation tags to producers based on damage.

Current Game, Fish & Parks policy allows 48 hours for action on a depredation complaint. We favor shortening the time period to 8 hours.

We support more effective predator control measures. Government agencies shall control predators. GF&P should return a percentage of its income to counties for predator control.

We support the use of snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles and aircraft by coyote hunters engaged in livestock protection.

Questions:

1. Is the change in GF&P's management of the animal damage control program going to negatively impact producers?
2. Should county Farm Bureaus promote creation of more predator control districts?
3. Are there alternative funding mechanisms that should be developed for predator control efforts?