A PROGRAM FOR DIRECTED PREDATOR CONTROL IN MINNESOTA

Prepared by

Donald S. Balser

Section of Research and Planning

Minnesota Division of Game and Fish

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A Program for Directed Predator Control in Minnesota

The following program for directed predator control in Minnesota was planned and developed with the cooperation of the U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Branch of Predator and Rodent Control.

This program is designed to apply control to specific animals causing damage, or in limited trouble areas based upon a proved need for control. To understand the reasons behind the new and different objectives of the proposed plan it is necessary to go back and examine some of the shortcomings of previous predator control practices.

The need for predator control in Minnesota occurs chiefly where livestock losses are involved. Livestock losses and complaints have continued in spite of long established control methods and bounties. Some sheepmen in the north have been forced out of business because of losses to coyotes in recent years. An organized and directed predator control system should encourage sheep ranching in north central Minnesota.

The need for predator control as a means of increasing game is not clearly demonstrated in Minnesota, or elsewhere in the U. S.

Losses to wildlife from predators, while individually often spectacular, are seldom of significance population-wise. Prey species learn to adjust to predation or suffer extinction, yet no predator except man has ever caused extermination of its prey.

There are two major reasons why overall population reduction of predators is not necessary in the case of wildlife. First, predation of a serious nature is the exception rather than the rule. Second, predators do not compete seriously with man except where man fully utilizes a wildlife species as is done on certain European game preserves. In Minnesota we often have underharvests of rabbits, squirrels, pheasants, grouse, and in some areas, even deer.

When predator losses of a serious nature occur, the only solution is to apply effective control directed at the animal causing damage at a certain time or place.

Under the present system of paying bounties there is no positive protection against either livestock losses or wildlife losses. There is only the hope that someone will, by chance, happen to kill the right animal causing damage. The money to pay bounties is provided under the present system but the incentive, the know-how, or the interest to control certain predators is often lacking. As a result, control is at best haphazard.

Trapping is the most effective method of predator control that can presently be used in Minnesota. A problem is to obtain enough trappers, in the proper location. Unfortunately, the last few years we have been losing experienced trappers at an alarming rate. Some are giving up because trapping does not pay enough, and others are growing too old for this strenuous occupation. Few young men are interested or have time to take up trapping. The best trappers in the state are very discouraged by the heavy loss of stolen animals and traps to the point where they will have to quit or move to Alaska. Because of 25 and 35 dollar bounties on wolves some of our experienced trappers lose a large percentage of their catch to thieves who steal for bounty. Higher bounties would tend to increase fraud and trap robbing. The decrease in trappers and lack of adequate coverage is a real problem to consider in predator control.

Only six states in the United States continue to pay statewide fox bounties. South Dakota which pays the most, $7.50 per fox, still has high fox populations; yet other states without bounties report no significant increase in foxes. This is a good example of the ineffectiveness of undirected population reduction. Theoretically, bounties might work if payments were made high enough; however, the numbers of predators killed do not rise in proportion to the price paid. Missouri, for example, found that a 200 percent increase in coyote bounties resulted in only a 25 percent increase in predators killed. The bounty system has been successful only when a price is placed on one certain animal rather than on all individuals of a species. The last stock killing wolf in the southwest was reportedly eliminated with a bounty of $1,500.00 on his head. In other areas

bounties on individual animals have often run into hundreds of dollars before the animals were destroyed, and still the local populations were not wiped out.

Somewhere along the line in the evolution of bounties the serious mistake was made of transferring bounty payments from one individual animal causing trouble to all members of the species.

After years of experience in paying bounties it is now obvious that general statewide bounty payments will not eliminate predators or even prevent their increase. Such animals as the fox and coyote are here to stay - in fact they thrive near civilization. It is also certain that the cost to accomplish control of entire populations of these animals is not economically justified with present day control methods.

Recognizing the serious limitations of the bounty system the following control program was developed as a positive approach to predator problems.

A. Objectives:

1. To prevent or alleviate economic losses against agricultural interests through means of organized, directed control efforts by a small but efficient and experienced group of control specialists.
2. To apply directed control only against individual animals causing damage, or against limited trouble areas where problems are chronic. Under this objective, control will be applied where it will do the most good with least expense.

B. Organization and Operation:

1. The program is to be a cooperative project with the Minnesota Division of Game and Fish, the Federal Branch of Predator and Rodent Control and various livestock groups and local governmental units participating. The program in its initial stages is designed to start in a slow and modest fashion and expand only by popular demand as it proves its worth. The proposed program is a combination of the best proven methods evolved to date and fitted to the Minnesota

problem. The experience of the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control in effecting a high degree of control in many western states is new to Minnesota. The annual federal budget for predator control is over $1,400,000.00. Minnesota presently receives none of this. Fish and Wildlife Service Regions I and II in the West receive over $1,000,000.00. The states of Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota receive $88,000.00. Minnesota is qualified to receive financial assistance for predator control under any approved system except bounty payments. This proposed program of predator control for Minnesota can make full use of the federal government's financial backing and the experience, training, and supervision of its personnel.

2. The administration of the program will be the responsibility of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Branch of Predator and Rodent Control. The district agent for Minnesota will be in charge of hiring personnel who will be selected from native Minnesotans with a specialized ability in taking predators and for their knowledge of the area. The district agent for Minnesota will also arrange for the negotiation of cooperative agreements and financing among the participating agencies.

3. The directed predator control program will consist of two parts, the trapper trainer phase and the paid trapper phase.
Phase one will be in effect in the southern and western counties and will be known as a trapper-trainer system. This phase is designed primarily to alleviate losses due to foxes. The trapper-trainer will be an experienced fox trapper with the ability and willingness to teach others. Fox can be controlled most effectively and easily by the farmer living on the land providing he has the know-how. Most farmers are willing to take care of their own pest problems if they can, but because of their lack of know-how fox

control has always been a problem for them. Few people know how to take foxes effectively so they clamor for help. The principal here is to teach people to help themselves. The training is quick and relatively inexpensive and if more training is needed a follow up call is made. The trapper-trainer is equipped with movies, slides, and trapping equipment and his services are made available to small groups of farmers through the local game warden or county agent. The trapper-trainer will also teach F.F.A., 4H, Sportsmens groups, or anyone else interested in preventing or stopping predator losses. Traps and equipment will be made available at cost through a revolving fund set up by cooperating agencies. The trapper-trainer conducts the field training right on the farm where losses are occuring. His services will also be valuable when other predators may cause particular problems such as an eruption of skunk or raccoon populations. States having experience with the trapper-trainer system have found it to be very effective in stopping complaints and losses.

4. The second phase of the program will consist of three salaried trappers to be placed strategically in the north. In the north, most predation occurs in Itasca, Beltrami, Cass, and surrounding counties. In surveying predator losses the Fish and Wildlife Service has contacted numerous livestock associations and groups of farmers in Minnesota to explain the proposed program. In nearly all cases they showed interest and a willingness to cooperate. A number of groups also indicated they would be willing to contribute towards the salary of a trapper in their area who would be subject to immediate call and would give them protection which they do not have now. Contributions from livestock men and farmers is nothing new. Cooperative funds for predator control on a national scale exceed the budget of the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control and amount to over

$2,500,000.00 annually.

The three salaried trappers would be dispatched on a complaint basis and when caught up on complaints would be assigned to work on potential trouble spots or sensitive areas of unusually high predator populations. The incentive of the salaried trapper, unlike the loosely supervised trappers in the past, is maintained by annual negotiation of wages on a merit basis along with a keen spirit of competition which exists among the trappers.

As more cooperative funds become available and more is budgeted by the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control, the coverage of the paid trappers can be extended upon demand by the people.

These salaried trappers will be in the employ of the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control, but the equipment, purchased in part by state cooperative funds, will remain in title of the State of Minnesota. The best experienced trappers of the federal government are available to give additional training to the paid trappers. The work on predators and control techniques of the Denver Wildlife Research Laboratory, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are also ready to help with problems and to search for new control chemicals and techniques.

It is only through directed and supervised control activities that proper control can be achieved on a financially sound basis.

C. Financing:

The cooperative predator control program is to be jointly financed under a cooperative agreement between the Conservation Department of the State of Minnesota, the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and other private or governmental agencies desiring to participate.

The monies alloted to this program are tentatively as follows:

Branch of Predator and Rodent Control	$12,000.00
Minnesota Division of Game and Fish	$18,000.00
Cooperative funds from various live-stock groups and local governmental groups desiring to participate to obtain predator control (estimate). (Experience in other states has shown that cooperating funds rapidly exceed budgeted funds).	$10,000.00
Total	$40,000.00

An estimated $40,000.00 annually will be provided for the salaries, equipment, expenses, and administration of the two phases of the Directed Predator Control Program for Minnesota.

A breakdown of the $18,000.00 budgeted by the Minnesota Division of Game and Fish for Directed Predator Control in Minnesota is shown in the Appendix.

This report is respectfully submitted with the sincere hope the proposed program will lead to a systematic and effective solution of predator control problems in Minnesota.

APPENDIX

Phase I - Trapper-Trainer

Summary of Costs:

		Rate	Total
(a)	SALARIES AND WAGES:		
a-1	Trapper-trainer 4800-5400	400.00	4,800.00
(b)	TRAVEL EXPENSES (1) Subsistence		
b-1	Trapper trainer 150 days	5.00	750.00
	(2) Travel		
b-2	Trapper-trainer 18,000 estimated mileage	.075	1,350.00
	Vehicle 1,500.00 & 700.00 estimated expenses (2,200) (Alternative choice of mileage or vehicle purchase).		
		TOTAL	6,830.00
(c)	EQUIPMENT		
c-1	Office equipment		
	Desk, chair, & lamp to be obtained from state surplus property		70.00
	file	50.00	50.00
	typewriter	100.00	100.00
		TOTAL	220.00
c-2	Field equipment		
	Movie Projector		300.00
	Slide Projector		100.00
	Film - (prepared movie & raw film)		100.00
	Traps and equipment (hatchet, carrier, scent, drags and stakes, canvas gloves, small tools)		200.00
		TOTAL	700.00
(d)	MATERIAL AND SUPPLIES		
d-1	Office and stationery supplies		100.00
d-2	Lumber, wire, etc. for constructing displays and special equipment used in demonstrations		50.00
		TOTAL	150.00
(e)	OTHER EXPENSES		
e-1	Communications (telephone, postage)		100.00
		TOTAL	100.00

Summary of estimated costs Phase I:

from Item (a), (b-1), and (b-2)	6,830.00
(c)	220.00
(c-2)	700.00
(d)	150.00
(e)	100.00
TOTAL	8,000.00

APPENDIX

Phase II - Control Agents

Summary of Costs:

(a)	SALARIES AND WAGES:		Rate	Total
a-1	Mammal Control Agent 4200-4800		350.00	4,200.00
a-2	Salary to be used with Federal, County and Association funds in hiring additional trappers			2,000.00
(b)	TRAVEL EXPENSES			
	(1) Subsistence			
b-1	Mammal control agent 100 days		5.00	500.00
	(2) Travel by personal automobile			
b-2	Mammal control agent 18,000 miles		.075	1,350.00
			TOTAL	8,050.00
(c)	EQUIPMENT	Unit Cost		
c-1	Field equipment			
	Traps #3N 8 doz.	32.30		258.40
	Traps #4N 36 doz.	34.20		1,026.00
	Traps, Bear #150 2 doz.	234.95		469.90
	3/8" & 5/8" mild steel rod 500 lbs. for drags and stakes	16.00/CWT		80.00
			TOTAL	1,834.00
(d)	MATERIAL AND SUPPLIES			
d-1	Office and stationery supplies			50.00
d-2	Scent, bottles, etc.			15.70
(e)	OTHER EXPENSES			
e-1	Communications: postage and telephone			50.00

Total costs of Trapper-Trainer and Control Agent program

Phase I	8,000.00
Phase II	10,000.00
	18,000.00