

PETER A. DeFAZIO
4TH DISTRICT, OREGON

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE:
FISHERIES CONSERVATION,
WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

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AVIATION
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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Statement of Congressman Peter DeFazio

- PLEASE RESPOND TO:
- 2134 RAYBURN HOUSE OF. BLDG.
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3704
(202) 225-6416
 - 151 WEST 7TH AVE. #400
EUGENE, OR 97401-2649
(541) 465-6732
1-800-944-9603
 - P.O. Box 1557
COOS BAY, OR 97420-0333
(541) 269-2609
 - P.O. Box 2460
ROSEBURG, OR 97470-0511
(541) 440-3523
 - Peter.DeFazio@mail.house.gov

The recent accidental death of a pet German shepherd in Estacada is just one more reason to reform the USDA's Wildlife Services program (formerly "Animal Damage Control"). I've tried to reform the agency by eliminating funding for its lethal predator control program but old habits are hard to break and so far I've been unable to convince my colleagues in Congress to go along with my ideas. Unfortunately, it takes tragedies like this one to make a good case for changes. While many of WS' activities are justifiable, its lethal predator control program is inhumane, indiscriminate and dangerous. The Estacada case proves this in the most tragic way.

Not only are WS' lethal predator control programs dangerous and inhumane, they are ineffective and a waste of taxpayer dollars. Armed with an arsenal of lethal tools including steel-jaw leghold traps, poisons and aerial gunning, WS agents kill hundreds of thousands of predators each year. And the result? WS' own data reveals how wasteful this program is. For every dollar of reported livestock damage, WS spends three dollars in the West to "fix" the problem. The last decade of predator control by WS has not decreased livestock losses despite an increase in funding. In addition, the increased funding brought an increase in the number of coyotes killed, but NOT a decline in the coyote population.

There are alternatives available. The State of Kansas is not short on coyotes. Over 300,000 coyotes roam the Kansas plains. Yet for less than a tenth of the amount spent by the federal government on ineffective predator control in each of the other Western states, Kansas keeps predation problems in check. The state program teaches ranchers how to solve their own predation problems with prevention techniques such as guard dogs, fencing and night penning.

I'll keep working in Congress to make the case against lethal predator control funded by the federal government. I certainly hope that we won't have to see any other tragedies to stop this wasteful and harmful program and we can successfully reform the WS agency soon.