

predatorpress

Predator Defense Institute

Working to Protect Wildlife Since 1990

Winter 1999 / Vol. 6, Issue 1



Political Watchdog

Outcome of ballot initiatives and referenda in November 1998 (see page 23 for updates on legislation in Washington State and Oregon):

WINS:

California: Prop 4 (bans body-gripping traps used for fur trapping and two deadly poisons used to kill wildlife). Passed 58%-42%

New Jersey: Public Question 1 (protects one million acres of open space for wildlife habitat in New Jersey). Passed 66%-37%.

LOSSES:

Alaska: Prop 9 (would have banned wolf snaring). Failed 36%-64%. Opponents argued that it would prohibit gun ownership.

Minnesota: Amendment 2 (identifies hunting, fishing and trapping as a valued part of the state heritage "that shall be forever preserved"). Passed 77%-23%.

Utah: Prop 5 (requires a two-thirds majority of voters for approval of any future wildlife protection initiative). Passed 56%-44%.

Hitting Close to Home: The Horror of Wildlife Services

A Long Wait in a Trap

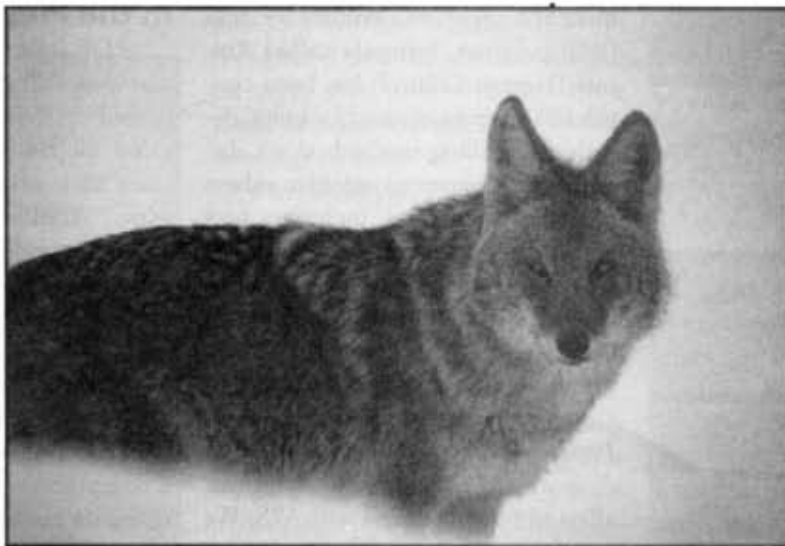
This story was written by Rita Freeman. She and her husband, Randy Oster, live in Clackamas County, Oregon. What they experienced is not an aberration; it happens daily throughout the US, wherever Wildlife Services operates.

It began like any normal busy weekend for us. We are building a nursery and a dream home on 10 acres we purchased late last year in the Estacada area. Little did we know as we planned our chores for the weekend that the events about to take place would change our perception of sheep farming and the federal government for-

Did Princess Have to Die?

Princess was a black lab mix about three years old when she met her untimely death. She was a stray who found a loving home for two wonderful years with 75-year-old Rex Struble in Sprague River, Oregon. Princess was a friendly, intelligent and playful dog. She was Mr. Struble's constant companion and watchdog, and slept on his bed every night. But on the afternoon of July 15, 1998, Mr. Struble couldn't find Princess anywhere near his rural home. It was out of character for Princess to wander far; worried, Mr. Struble began actively looking for her. He soon learned that government trapping signs had been spotted in the area, and his heart quickly sank. Intuitively he knew.

His searching followed a nearby trail into a neighboring pasture where he found Princess - her front leg caught in a leghold trap. But it was a day too late for Princess; she could not escape from the hot summer sun and died from heat exposure.



The main target: In fiscal year 1997, Wildlife Services killed 77,748 coyotes.

ever, as well as rob us of our peace of mind. On Friday evening, February 6, 1998, we returned from town to find our dogs had dug out of their kennel. We had never had a digging

Her collar with her rabies and identification tags were still around her neck. A pony's head and a calf's body rested close by the trap for bait. There were no warning signs in plain view that

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Long Time in a Trap

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problem with them before.

The next morning we went to the neighboring sheep rancher's to inquire if anyone there had seen our dogs. The rancher said he had not seen them.

As Saturday progressed, we continued to search for our dogs. We posted signs, and I went door to door. My husband Randy began searching the woods adjoining our property.

Upon Randy's return, I could instantly see something was gravely wrong by the look on his face. As he described to me the incredible scene he had witnessed, I was horrified. In the woods, about 200 yards from our dogs' kennel, he came upon the first of three trapping areas. What he saw when he got into the woods was, in his words, "the most vulgar display of death I've ever seen."

Before his eyes was the first of three piles of dead animals in a half-to one-mile stretch of woods. These piles included dead sheep, sheep tails, coyotes, otter, beaver, skunk, possum, and birds. The carcasses were numerous and in various states of decay. Some were no longer recognizable as to species, just a pile of goo where a wild animal had once been. All trails to each pile, were surrounded by a network of traps strategically placed to catch any animal drawn in by the stench of death. As he continued, he would witness a new horror at each turn. He had to toss stones at a coyote to determine whether it was alive but possibly sleeping, or dead. The

coyote was snared and had been lain at the trapping pile with the noose still secured around its neck. This coyote carcass, now being used for bait, had been tied to a tree so other animals could not drag it off. Around the entire pile, snares were set to entrap the next animal that would surely be drawn to the stench.

Puppy not so "Lucky"

As Randy continued his search around the trapping area, he came



RANDY OSTER © 1998

The unlucky puppy caught in neck snare required extensive surgery.

upon a puppy, about six months old, in a snare. Barely alive, the dog was dying a slow agonizing death by strangulation and dehydration. When Randy tried to get close, the puppy began to growl and snap at him. The snare, made of heavy aircraft cable, was longer than most, and he could do little to help her. Her distress at his presence was making her tighten the snare's grip, so he backed off.

After Randy finished telling me this shocking story, I immediately called the Clackamas County Sheriff to report the incident. But when Deputy Dennis S. Kauffman arrived and we told our tale, he informed us that he could not do anything at that

point for us, nor for the dog. He suggested we call the Clackamas County livestock officer, Deputy Robin Iverson, on Monday. We told him that the snared puppy would not survive until Monday and that we would go over ourselves to rescue it. Kauffman was not much help.

When the deputy left, Randy donned thick overalls, grabbed a pair of cable cutters and off he went to the trapping site. Cautiously approaching the trapped puppy, he slowly crawled over dead decaying animals on his hands and knees to get to the stake where the snare was anchored, all the while talking softly to the terrified animal. He worked for about ten minutes with the cutters to get through the cable; the pup soon realized Randy was not going to hurt her, and she began to drag herself toward him. When she got close enough she began to lick his hand. Unable to loosen the cable from the dog's neck, once the dog was freed, Randy tried to get her to walk

and follow him out of the woods, but she was too weak. He had to carry her back to our place.

We loosened and removed most of the cable from her neck, and put food and water next to her. She spent the rest of the weekend laying with her head next to the bowls we put out for her, eating and drinking water as she was able to.

Neighbor lied about seeing our dogs

Sickened by the realization that this mass trapping of animals was happening next door, and thinking that this kind of trapping was surely illegal, we decided to go back the next

day with video and camera and document what Randy had seen.

On Monday morning, February 9, Randy took the puppy to Wilsonville Veterinary Clinic for treatment. The vet kept "Lucky" (our nickname for this loving, golden lab/retriever mix) and determined it would be necessary to perform surgery to remove the rest of the snare from her neck.

He then went to Clackamas County Animal Control, where he spoke with J. Ross Craven, Dog Control Officer II.

Our rancher neighbor had, in fact, turned our dogs in on Friday afternoon, February 6. Why he deliberately lied to me when I asked him on Saturday morning if he had seen our dogs, I do not know. Apparently, the dogs had not chased the rancher's sheep but were found in his field. Randy

showed the officer our video tape of the trapping areas, which made it patently obvious that every animal – whether domestic or wild – was being baited into the area on purpose. Craven was horrified by the video footage and immediately released our two dogs to Randy.

That same day, I contacted State Fish and Wildlife and all other state agencies I could think of to inform them of what, at the time, I believed were illegal trapping practices. My calls basically fell on deaf ears or into the abyss of voice mail. Finally in frustration, I decided to contact the television media.

Never imagined it was the government's doing

On Tuesday morning, February 10, we reviewed all our information with Jon Catton of KGW News. We agreed to meet the next day, so he could investigate and film the violations for himself.

On Wednesday Randy was nearly driven off the road by Mark Lytle, a Wildlife Services employee, who was leaving the adjoining property where the trapping was being done. When we first met him several months earlier, he told us he regularly checked on the rancher's sheep and kept a travel trailer on the rancher's property.

Visibly shaken and almost in tears, Mark asked Randy, "Why did you do this to me? I never did anything to you. I have a wife and kids to support and I am probably going to lose my job over this." At this point in time we thought it was Wildlife Services' job to *prevent* rather than be the instrument of such horror, so Randy's natural response was: "Then *do* your job, Mark!"

We still assumed that the rancher was the culprit, and that we were exposing a farmer who was breaking the law. Never in our wildest dreams did we think that a federal government agency would be responsible for such a horrific act, and that we as taxpayers were paying for it. We were about to find out how wrong we could be and how angry we could be at a federal government and its employees totally out of control.

WS moves fast to clean up all the evidence

While Randy stood talking to Mark in the road and waiting for Jon Catton to show up, Catton was on the phone with me, telling me about how his morning inquiries had led him to the Wildlife Services office and to Dave Williams, State Director. Williams had told him we could be

charged with illegal trespass and theft of the snares, which were federal government property, both serious charges. But this discussion was mostly engineered to attempt to discredit us in Catton's eyes – and to serve as a delaying tactic to give Mark Lytle a head start to rush up to Estacada and clean up the decomposing animals and the traps.

By the time Jon Catton got out of Williams' office and obtained permission to access the property leased by the rancher where the trapping was done, the cover up was complete. Except for a few stray snares apparently missed by Lytle in his hasty clean up, and the gooey greasy spots where the most decayed animals had been, the area had been completely cleaned up – thanks to Wildlife Services. The only documentation remaining was the video and photos Randy had taken the previous Sunday.

Had someone told us this bizarre story, we would have perhaps thought that person was exaggerating. To see first hand as we did, this indiscriminate trapping of any and all species, baiting with other wild animals that had been snared and left in piles, and the reaction and cover up by our federal government, as well as their responsibility for this type of mass carnage was, to say the least, a sobering experience for Randy and me.

Friday the 13th leads to more horror

By Friday the 13th, Wildlife Services had rallied and enlisted the help of Deputy Robin Iverson, Wildlife Officer, in their attempts to silence us and Jon Catton of KGW. Deputy Iverson accused us of trespassing and stealing three federal government traps. I told her the only snare taken was the one that had been surgically removed from the rescued puppy's neck. She lectured me on how great Wildlife Services was, and how the rancher →

Sickened by the realization that this mass trapping of animals was happening next door, and thinking that this kind of trapping was surely illegal, we decided to go back the next day with video and camera and document what Randy had seen.

was just trying to protect his poor lambing sheep, and that they were well within their rights. She instructed me that all the Wildlife Services and the rancher wanted was their snares back. She demanded that we take the one snare we had and place it in a brown paper bag with her name on it, and leave it at the desk of Clackamas County Sheriff's office before Monday at 8:30 a.m. If we did this – returned the snare or snares she said we had stolen – she indicated there would not be any charges filed against us.

Randy and I let her know that if they wanted their snare badly enough to press the issue, we would return it in the presence of our attorney, and that we would need to get a receipt for its return; or it would be returned in front of Jon Catton's TV camera. After that phone call, we never heard any more about it, except that Wildlife Services supposedly wrote a letter to the rancher stating that the agency would no longer trap in the area because their property had been tampered with and three snares were stolen.

Rancher gets WS's blessing to blast us

We found all of this particularly interesting, in light of the fact that Jon Catton's video footage of the site, which was taken after the clean up, shows snares that were left behind. The agency's ability to count and keep track of their snares obviously needs work. None of the snares, including the one embedded in the dog's neck, was marked with Department of Ag-

riculture markings as they claimed and is required by law.

When the neighbors in our immediate community heard what was going on, many of them came out in our support. We found out most had lost dogs and were opposed to the trapping and methods used by Wildlife Services. Fortunately, they were willing to help, with us leading the charge,



Strangled in neck snare, this coyote was one of many drawn to a heap of rotting wild animal carcasses purposely placed by Wildlife Services. Pets were also imperiled by their attraction to the area.

in exposing and stopping the trapping and carnage.

Subsequent to the traps' removal, propane cannons were supplied to the rancher by Wildlife Services, in the name of an alternate form of sheep protection. They were set on a timer to boom loudly every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day, from two locations on the rancher's property. In addition, a radio hooked up to a public address system pointed in our direction and played loudly round the clock. Neighbors' complaints resulted in the rancher requesting their support allowing a resumption of trapping. Clearly the rancher and WS were using noise harassment to punish us and the commu-

nity for objecting to their cruel and indiscriminate killing of wildlife and domestic animals as their only method of protecting a small herd of sheep.

The music and cannons continued past the lambing season into May and June. Repeated calls to the Clackamas County Sheriff's Department went unheeded. In desperation, trying to save some of our peace of mind, we hooked up a Public Address system similar to the one the rancher had pointed at us. Within hours we received a call from Clackamas Sheriff Bowman saying he had confiscated our stereo system and speaker and was writing a report to the Clackamas County District Attorney asking that Randy be charged with criminal misconduct for harassing the rancher! In response to our complaints we were told in a letter

from Wildlife Services that the rancher is allowed to play music at all hours of the day and night to protect his sheep from predators. Unbelievably, the rancher has the right to do whatever he wants to protect his sheep even breaking laws the rest of the public is obligated to obey. (As I write this piece, on October 26, 1998, criminal charges are still pending against us, and we have been told by the Clackamas County District Attorney's office that we have *no right* to a copy of Wildlife Services' letter unless or until this matter goes to trial.)

Why is the Federal government in the business of subsidizing sheep ranchers? This rancher does not prac-

tice good husbandry, and he utilizes none of the standard, sensible precautions which could protect his sheep, such as using guard dogs or llamas, or penning his sheep in barns or lambing sheds at night. In fact, he allows the sheep to graze all 350 acres at will.

On July 19, these sloppy ranching practices led to the first of three separate incidents in which we found the rancher's sheep in our fields

eating our nursery stock. After numerous attempts to talk to the rancher and the Sheriff's office, after leaving many messages, Randy (and a neighbor whose property was also regularly trespassed by the sheep) repaired the dilapidated fence line where the sheep were crossing. To this day, neither the neighbor nor we have heard a word from the rancher. Evidently he is so used to having others, including the taxpayers, take care of his sheep for

him that he does not feel it necessary to respond to our messages or offer thanks for herding his sheep and fixing his fence line.

Toward the end of September, we noticed buzzards circling the areas where we had found the traps and dead animals. Several times we heard distinct howling of animals in pain. Then one day, the sheriff called to tell us that our dogs were spotted in the rancher's field. Our dogs had been trained since the February incident with a radio controlled fence and had not violated training even once.

Back to square one?

We put two and two together, and of course began to worry that Wildlife Services or the rancher had gone back to baiting traps. On Monday, September 28, our worst fears were realized as Wildlife Services trapping notices suddenly appeared on the land adjoining ours. The trapping had started up again. This answered a lot of questions for us. It confirmed that the buzzards we had been watching for almost three weeks were, in fact,

circling the traps, and it also explained why our dogs had crossed the fence line after eight months of total obedience to our training. It fit in with the painful howling we had heard.

Oh my God! We were right back in the same place we had been earlier in the year. As our anger flared and we began a letter-writing campaign to protest this new round of trapping, the signs were removed — just as fast and mysteriously as they had appeared.

What did this bizarre posting of the property mean? Our neighbor told us he had witnessed Mark Lytle putting the signs up on Monday and taking them down on Thursday. Was it a token attempt by Wildlife Services to post the property and follow their own procedures? How come the signs disappeared so quickly? What is Wildlife Services up to? Are they still trapping even though they have taken down the signs? If so, is this trapping being done within the Wildlife Services guidelines, or are they allowing or stocking the piles of carnage we found earlier in the year? →

The trapping signs were removed — just as fast and mysteriously as they had appeared.

Exactly what is Wildlife Services and what do they do?

Wildlife Services — a pleasant euphemism replacing its former name, "Animal Damage Control" — is part of the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). It spends millions of taxpayers' dollars every year to kill predators in the West for the benefit of relatively few sheep and cattle producers. While nonlethal methods of predator control have been found to be more effective in protecting livestock, a 1995 GAO report found that Wildlife Services uses lethal methods in almost all instances to control predators. In addition, Wildlife Services routinely launches lethal predator control programs *in anticipation* of potential predation *without any confirmed losses*. The aerial gunning program is a good example of this indiscriminate killing.

FISCAL YEAR 1997

| | |
|--|---------------|
| National Budget: | \$ 45,321,000 |
| Total animals killed: | 1,816,539 |
| Animals killed by lethal methods: | 1,816,539 |
| Samples of species killed | |
| Coyotes | 77,748 |
| Black bears | 321 |
| Bobcats | 1,844 |
| Wolves | 213 |
| Cougars | 530 |
| Feral/free ranging dogs (reported) | 919 |
| Feral/free ranging cats (reported) | 1,066 |

By Method Killed or Taken

| | Total Animals | Coyotes |
|--|---------------|---------|
| M-44 (spring-activated sodium cyanide device) | 20,219 | 18,219 |
| Livestock Protection Collar (Compound 1080 poison) | 62 | 62 |
| Leghold Trap | 19,544 | 9,621 |
| Aerial Gunning | 34,111 | 32,786 |
| Leg/Foot Snare | 236 | 1 |
| Neck Snare | 17,308 | 8,990 |
| Spotting | 12,275 | 27 |
| Calling | 6,646 | 6,011 |
| Shooting | 92,219 | 3,097 |
| Denning (burning pups in dens) | 2,141 | 1,763 |
| Chemical | 1,216,099 | 273 |
| Other Methods | 19,222 | 1,534 |

