

LACK OF EFFECTIVE PREDATOR CONTROL - HYPER INFLATION - AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT WE MAY LOSE OUR RIGHTS BEFORE ITS ALL OVER.

Pat Loughlin is right, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to understand why we are losing our sage grouse - almost anywhere you travel you're bound to see large numbers of ravens - but rarely do you see sage grouse.

In 1988, Shiver and Retterer, found sage grouse recruitment in Washoe County very low, averaging only 1.1 chick per every 100 hens. The number of sage grouse harvested had declined by 81% between 1970 and 1982. As a result, a study was initiated in 1989 whereby 1,400 brown chicken eggs were placed in 200 simulated sage grouse nests on two study areas in northern Washoe County. Within 15 days, all 1,400 eggs had been destroyed. In one of the study areas, 84% of the nests were destroyed within the first 3 days of the study.

In 1980 the Oregon Game and Fish Department became concerned that they were rapidly losing pronghorn production throughout southern Oregon. Determining that coyote predation was the primary cause, a coyote control program was instigated adjacent to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 1982.

Average pronghorn fawn production in the 1950's, during the height of predator control, by three separate studies, was 111 fawns for every 100 does. Antelope counts conducted in 1982, 83, and 84, indicated only 3, 2, and 3 fawn were being raised for every 100 does. When coyote control was implemented in 1985, 86, and 87, production increased to 35 fawns per 100 does in 1985, 72 fawns per 100 does in 1986, and 84 fawns per 100 does in 1987.

Sage grouse benefitted as well. Brood surveys completed in 1984 found there were only 6 chicks for every 100 adults. In 1985, sage grouse production had increased to 61 chicks for every 100 adults. In 1986, production had increased to 70 chicks for every 100 adults.

In 1982, 42 raven breeding territories were identified on and near the refuge. In 1983, 40 depredated eggs were found below one raven nest. Think what might have occurred should a ravens control program have been completed in conjunction with the ongoing coyote control program. Sage grouse production may have returned to the levels of the 1940's, 50's and 60's.

Studies of these kinds have been completed again and again over the decades - beginning in the early 1900's and extending into the 1990's - in Nevada, in Oregon, in Alaska, all across the nation, involving elk, deer, antelope, sage grouse, and a host of other prey animals. The results have remained the same - instigate effective predator control practices and in no time a balance in animal life is achieved allowing prey animals to flourish. But can we tell agency people this? Can we get them to go along with instigating effective predator control practices? No we can't. Pat Laughlin said it best, it's as if the (p) word is unspeakable among their rank and file. Never do they admit that it was man's influence upon our rangelands that brought about the great abundance of wildlife that was evident thirty and forty years ago.

Recently my wife and I had occasion to be traveling through Oregon. While there, I wanted to reacquaint myself with what was going on at the Malheur Refuge having gained a good deal of information about the area in the 1980's. While browsing through some of the material in the

refuge library I came across an article written as a letter to the editor of the local newspaper in 1976. The author was explaining the frustration of having to work with agency personal. Every human activity was being shunned - ranching, mining, off road vehicle travel, hunting and trapping - all human activity seemed to be coming under attack. Returning the countryside to a pristine state seemed to be the only management scheme that was acceptable to those working within federal and state agencies.

Unfortunately, things have not changed much over the years. Today's agency personnel seem to be as determined as ever to reduce man's influence upon the earth. Take the recent initiative to close roads. Nowhere have I found evidence indicating that roads are harmful to resource values. Yet on and on they go, closing off one area after another, with no science what-so-ever showing that such closures are beneficial in any way to wildlife or rangeland values.

For a while, I thought Elko County was going to take a stand against such abuse - using NEPA's provisions, whereby federal agencies are required to coordinate their planning processes with developed local plans - but then, in the end, just when the most important step was to be taken in the process, they caved in, and went back to their old ways of only supplying public input to the agency - just as they have been doing for the last forty years or so.

It was as though, at the last minute, they just couldn't bring themselves to challenge the government people as they need to be challenged. Too many years of going to the government hat in hand I suppose. And too, I must admit, no mining operation or ranch can be truly successful these days unless homage is paid to those in government. Not many today want their commissioners to take a hard stand.

In the interim, I expect we will be seeing further cuts in grazing - more road closures, less and less hunting opportunity, and even more harm done to our nation's economy. But then, perhaps, that's what it's going to take. Perhaps in the future, when hyper inflation has set in, when the dollar is no longer worth bothering with, when unemployment reaches twenty to twenty five percent and the nation is in chaos - perhaps then, we Americans will began standing up against the abuses of government. I only wish it would have happened ten or twenty years ago. The way it is now, we stand to lose everything this nation has ever stood for. It's a shame the way the American people have been neglecting their responsibilities.