

1970's DEER CONTROVERSY

Along in the late 1960's, the state game department began a study involving mule deer. Every day or so during the Fall and early Winter, they would drag the old dirt road that ran through the hills between Ruby Valley and highway 93. Before each dragging, they would count deer tracks, so as to determine the number of deer that were migrating through that part of the country.

They also had a couple of sights set up, one at Indian Creek, in south Ruby Valley, and one near Spruce Mountain, where they would trap deer during the Winter. They would pull blood, sex, age and tag the deer and turn them loss again.

This went on for a number of years - with the wildlife people saying that the deer herd was increasing each year, while many sportsmen were saying that they were seeing fewer and fewer deer.

The sportsmen were not the only ones that were saying that there were getting to be fewer and fewer deer, many ranchers were saying the same thing. I remember reading several letters printed in the Free Press, to the effect that this rancher or that rancher had been riding such and such country for most of their lives and had never seen so few deer.

Much of the controversy centered around recent reductions in predator control. While the wildlife people were saying that predation was of no consequence, either on wildlife or sheep - the sheepmen were saying that the cut backs were not only causing them to lose large numbers of sheep and lambs, but were hurting the wildlife as well. It got pretty heated for a while.

I was spending a lot of my time on the mountain during that time, salting and moving cattle in the Spring - gathering in the Fall. I was doing a lot of hunting too. I'd take people hunting either on foot or horse-back just for the sheer pleasure of being on the mountain. The decline in deer numbers was so obvious - I couldn't understand why the agency people were so reluctant to admit what was happening.

I suppose, in a way, many of we cattlemen of my generation were somewhat at fault. We had not lived during a time when there were large numbers of predators around. We had not seen calves killed or deer killed by coyotes. At first, I blamed all of the loss on hunting. I thought it was neat, having so many coyotes around, I didn't realize the effects that the coyotes were having on our deer and sagegrouse - that was, until I started seeing the effects.

During the fall of 1971 and 1972, every time I went deer hunting I would see two or three fresh deer carcasses, cleaned up "slick as a whistle";

not one bit of meat left on the skeletons. And then I began seeing the same thing in the fields during summer. Healthy deer, a good many does and even a healthy 4 point buck, pulled down in less than a hundred yards. But it didn't stop there; there were a lot of coyotes and they were hungry, and the next spring when calving started the coyotes started killing our calves. We found one calf that had its tongue half eaten. The calf was alive and may have survived but we had to kill it because it could not eat.

Needless to say, that Fall my neighbors and I contacted the Animal Damage people and ask if they wouldn't fly our meadows and kill all the coyotes they could. The first morning they flew they killed 56 coyotes from Len Wines's to the 7H ranch; a distance of nine miles.

Anyway, to make a long story short, even though the government people were telling everyone that deer were increasing, all of a sudden they were down at the state legislature, lobbying for monies to be taken from the state budget - saying that there were so few deer, they were going to have to initiate a draw system, whereby only a certain percentage of those who put in would be issued a tag.

There were so few deer, they claimed, that they were going to have to close down deer hunting altogether in the western part of the state - either that, or they were going to have to issue tags for bucks, four points or larger only, because, they said, if they didn't, they were going to lose all of their deer in that area,

This really caused an uproar. Everyone was upset; the sheepmen; the sportsmen; a lot of the ranchers. It didn't bother the NDOW people however. Typically, in bureaucratic fashion, they just went on, always blaming something or someone else for any loss of wildlife.

The range was overgrazed, they said. There were too many cattle and sheep in the country. Something had to be done. And of course, with the help of people within the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, it wasn't long until they had the livestock people on the defense again.

All the controversy - all of the grief and heart-ache and loss by those who were in the sheep business - all the loss of hunting opportunity - the agency people didn't care - non of it hurt them. For them, controversy is good - it tends to bring attention the them and their agency - and more often than not ends with them getting an increase in their budgets.

See attached letters to the Editor, by Elias Goicoechea and John Marvel

Elias Goicoechea

Deer Herd Declines Blamed on Coyotes

Elias Goicoechea, president of the Nevada Woolgrowers Association, contends predators, primarily coyotes, are responsible for recent declines in the deer population of northern Nevada.

Goicoechea, who is a rancher in the North Fork area of northern Elko County, recently prepared a news release which traces the decline of deer in this region back to the federal elimination of effective predator control.

He recalls that 1080 poison was first used in Nevada on Nov. 28, 1945, with instruction from experts sent to this area from Denver as part of a predator control effort that included most western states. Supervision for that program was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and control methods included the use of both 1080 and strychnine as well as traps and the M-44 "coyote getter" (which shoots strychnine into the mouth of a predator).

Goicoechea reports, "Good control was kept of the predators between 1945 and 1960 due to the

proper use of chemicals and traps."

He said a "harvest" of some 9,000 coyotes per year was recorded during those years, but in 1960 the 1080 program was curtailed by federal regulation and in 1971 the federal government abolished the use of all chemicals in predator control.

He makes parallel comparisons showing that in the early 1960s the deer population hit a peak, with deer herds in abundance in virtually all parts of Elko County.

Goicoechea contends that coyote populations "were barely controlled with the use of all chemicals and devices," and the restraints on predator control have allowed excessive increases in the numbers of these animals.

He also points out the numbers of livestock (particularly sheep) and of rabbits have diminished significantly in recent years — and one of the principal foods available to these abundant coyotes is deer.

In addition to the coyote problem, Goicoechea claims moun-

tain lions constitute a serious predator threat to deer; and he points out a mature lion will eat one deer each week. He said he sees evidence of fresh deer kills by mountain lions frequently in his part of northern Elko County.

Goicoechea emphasized the decline in deer hunting success — which hit a peak of some 36,000 animals tagged in 1962 and declined to a reported total of less than 5,000 in 1975 — parallels the increase in predator population which has occurred since government regulations on the use of predator poisons have grown increasingly restrictive since 1960.

He concluded by urging residents of this area to contact members of Congress and other officials in support of restoring the availability of toxic chemicals to allow an effective program for the control of predators in northern Nevada.

Goicoechea declared: "If we are to have an increase in our deer herds and other game, the only solution is to lift the ban on toxicants and put it back into the hands of the Fish and Wildlife Service."

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Editor:

"Range over-use and habitat change are the principal contributors to the decline of deer populations in most areas of the state".

This is a typical statement of the Nevada Fish and Game staff, which infuriates me. These commentaries are loosely and generally framed for a purpose. The purpose is to take the heat off of Fish and Game because of its poor management practices and to in turn make scapegoats out of everyone that uses or manages Nevada range — including private property.

The time is rapidly approaching when the ranchers in the State of Nevada are going to have to rally together and aggressively fight this arrogant agency and refuse to cooperate in any manner as a result of irresponsible public statements that do not tell the truth. I recognize that we do have a few isolated areas that are abused but I do not think we should tolerate a blanket indictment of livestock grazing any longer.

Some of the real reasons for the decimation of our game

herds can be summed up in a few short statements.

1. Politics — allowing too many people to hunt too few animals.

2. Refusal to acknowledge a serious predator problem. (Fish and game would enjoy placing predators on the game list in order to further intimidate the livestock industry.)

3. Abstaining from active pursuit in attempting to implement a positive feral horse management program. Fish and game, in my knowledge, has only paid token lip-service to a serious range problem.

Hypocrisy upsets me as much as "un-truths". In the past year the livestock industry has been assured that there would be no more public statements critical of our industry. Yet on December 27, 1975, there appeared in the Elko Daily Free Press an article released by the staff of Fish and Game from which I extracted the opening quoted statement of this article.

You also might be interested in knowing that Fish and Game is jealously eyeing federal money being spent on predator

programs by the U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service. We are on record, by resolution, opposing the handover of this program to this state agency because we feel predation has been handled effectively under the present program. I personally do not have confidence in our Fish and Game with this responsibility because I honestly feel these monies would be diverted to other uses. If the federal agency wishes to shed this responsibility I would be more comfortable in having the program administered by our Nevada State Department of Agriculture.

I am sorry for my outrage because in the past we have meticulously advocated state control of game animals as opposed to federal management. But with constant irresponsible public statements damning the rancher I think it is time to reconsider our position and seek to advocate some other type of game management than what we presently have.

Respectfully,
John Marvel,
President
Nevada Cattlemen's
Association

Letters to the Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE: The opinions expressed in the letters used by the Elko Daily Free Press do not necessarily express the opinion of this newspaper. We hope that the "Letter Box" will always be considered a place for the exchange of ideas, and give our readers an opportunity to express themselves publicly upon problems of all kinds.

Editor:

As a beef producer using public lands it is tempting to take a pot shot at Mr. Freeman and those who would attack our grazing privileges, however, we should assume that they are only ignorant of the following facts.

The large grazing animals are an integral part of the ecology. The grass-eater, the browser, the forb user, predators, birds, burrowing types, rodents, etc., even the angleworms are part of the system of nature. To remove one species is to disrupt the system.

Livestock are the species that can most readily be managed as

to their number, area, and season of use. Livestock management can be used to help balance the whole system.

A large part of the wealth of our area is generated by the livestock industry.

A state with a broad base of industry is the most solid.

Recent events in Las Vegas show that gaming-tourism, our largest industry, is also vulnerable. The suit decided in California against Harrah's may only be the tip of the iceberg. There is certainly resentment in the large population areas in the surrounding states, when their surpluses are drained into our state.

The problem in Ely proves that when one industry is hurt we all suffer.

The Ad Valorem tax paid by property owners is a relatively stable source of revenue, but other tax revenues can fluctuate rapidly.

Mr. Freeman may hate to step in a cowpie. My heart skips a beat when my horse hits a badger hole. You may not like those bumps in your lawn from the night crawlers, but we are all a part of this country and we all need each other.

Respectfully,
William B. Gibbs
Wells

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