

My Turn

Coyote control efforts have the 'opposite effect'

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The Taos News, 6/2/2016

I'm writing in response to the article stating Taos is entering into a contract with USDA Wildlife Services for coyote control.

First of all it is important to understand why there is an increase in coyote activity, not just in Taos County, but practically everywhere across the U.S. The increase in indiscriminate killing of coyotes is directly related to the increase in the number of coyotes being sighted. When normal pack dynamics are disrupted by the removal of one or both of a breeding pair (the alpha pair), there is no control by the alphas to prevent breeding among younger coyotes which normally would not be allowed by the alpha pair to breed. This increases the number of litters produced each year.

Due to the proliferation of coyote killing contests, bounties being offered, and various agencies who offer their "services" to anyone complaining about coyote sightings, the indiscriminate and very damaging slaughter of coyotes and other predators is having the opposite effect of what ranchers and others are promised.

USDA Wildlife Services is responsible for the slaughter of more than 75,000 coyotes a year in the United States with poisons, traps and shooting. In 2014, this agency killed more than 2.7 million animals under the guise that they are protecting livestock and humans who feel threatened by animals less likely to cause injury than the family dog.

Thankfully, there is a movement to suspend renewal of decades-old contracts with Wildlife Services. Mendocino County in California was the most recent victory for a coalition of environmentalists and wildlife protection groups who filed a lawsuit against them for failing to complete a legally required review before approving a \$142,356 contract authorizing the agency to kill predators.

Non-lethal methods of deterring predation are available and effective, while allowing the normal flow of nature to self-regulate. Assuming Wildlife Services will implement non-lethal methods is inconsistent with the way they have operated for decades, as attested to by previous employees of that agency. Past Wildlife Services employees have stepped forward in recent years to testify about the indiscriminate and reckless killing of wildlife, including a mantra commonly referred to as "shoot, shovel, shut up" whenever a non-target animal is found in one of their traps or poisoned or shot by this agency. Wildlife Services has a reputation of being one of the least transparent agencies in the U.S. government.

It was stated in the article that officials said they would implement various methods of control, then “if that doesn’t work ... trapping and relocation will be attempted.” Since June 2013, the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish has banned relocation or rehabilitation of coyotes and other predators by licensed rehabilitation centers or anyone else. Either the person who made this statement is oblivious to the ban or is attempting to mollify citizens who object to the killing of our wildlife.

The bottom line is humans have encroached upon wildlife and their habitat — not the other way around. Senseless slaughter of wildlife in the name of “management” has been a failure for hundreds of years. A healthy ecosystem relies on all native flora and fauna to exist without the interference of humans. Coexistence among all is possible if proper, non-lethal measures are taken to discourage predation on livestock and domestic pets. It bears repeating that the family dog is a bigger threat to other living things than any type of wildlife.

I hope Taos will reconsider entering into a contract with Wildlife Services, as there are many groups willing to assist in education and implementation of non-lethal methods of discouraging the presence of animals some people don’t like to see in their neighborhood.

Judy Paulsen is a New Mexico/ Colorado representative for Project Coyote.

