WHY
BOUNTIES
DON'T PAY
Why Bounties Don't Pay

Whenever predator control comes to public attention, as it has in British Columbia very forcefully in the last few years, there are always many advocates for bounties. Put a price on the head of the errant wolves (or other predators) they say, and their populations will soon be cut down to size. A bounty system, they are likely to add, could put money into the pockets of some of the unemployed and accomplish control of predators at less cost than hiring helicopters or buying expensive leg-hold traps to loan to trappers. As an added bonus, the social gain and apparent saving of tax dollars would render the whole operation much more acceptable to the public and improve the image of provincial wildlife managers. So why not use bounties?

The short answer is, they don't work. British Columbia paid bounties on coyote, cougar, and wolves for around half a century, starting sometime before 1907. The province ceased bountying coyote in 1954, wolves in 1955, and cougar in 1957. British Columbia was not merely following fashion in ending the bounty system, long experience had shown the cessation of bounties to be the only sensible course. Speaking against coyote bounties in 1954, G.A. West, then supervisor of predator control for the B.C. Game Commission, cited examples of the failure of the bounty system from many other states and provinces, and quoted an investigator who summarized the case against bounties as follows:

(1) They do not encourage concentration of effort against individual live stock and game killers.

(2) They do not encourage work when and where most needed; e.g., in the difficult terrain of summer stock ranges, or to protect valuable game species.

(3) They permit bounty hunters to concentrate their efforts during the season when pelts are prime, and to leave predators unmolested during other seasons.

(4) Their early success in bringing down large numbers of predators dwindles until those left for "seed" build up a population large enough to make bounty hunting profitable once again.

(5) They lead to fraudulent practices such as:—
    (a) Making claims for predators taken outside the paying area.
    (b) Releasing trapped females to maintain a breeding stock.
    (c) Submitting counterfeit or substitute parts of animals not legally eligible for bounty collections.
(6) They encourage theft of animals and equipment from law-abiding trappers.

(7) They do not provide means of meeting emergencies, such as rabies outbreaks, or excessive live stock or game killings concentrated in isolated regions.

(8) They are usually ineffective in controlling predator populations.

(9) They result in money being paid out for animals killed accidentally or incidentally.

In modern wildlife management the extermination of predators anywhere and everywhere is not an objective. Today "control" is confined to the elimination only of those few predators that are known to be a threat to domestic animals or to human life, and to the reduction of predator populations only in specific areas where the predators are severely depressing other wildlife populations. Bounties are haphazard and indiscriminate: any wolf, any coyote, any cougar, no matter where the animal is found, is likely to be killed if there is a price on its head. Bounties are not just a waste of money. They are wasteful of wildlife.

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