

Woolgrowers Win Round On Predator Control

President Ford has capitulated to pressure by sheep ranchers and lifted a 3-year ban on the use of sodium cyanide to kill coyotes and other predators on federal lands.

On July 18 Mr. Ford issued an executive order authorizing the use of the deadly poison for a 1-year period. He did so after being advised by Russell W. Peterson, chairman of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, that widespread poisoning of predators has not necessarily stopped predator coyotes in the past.

The poisoning program permits ranchers to use the M-44 to reduce losses of sheep to predators. The coyote getter, a cylindrical device, is hammered into the ground and fires a charge of sodium cyanide into the mouth of curious coyotes, causing certain and agonizing death. HSUS contends that there is no real need for this inhumane coyote killing program. The only justification the government can produce for such programs is statistics on sheep losses to coyotes compiled by the sheepmen themselves. The government has no system of its own for determining the number of sheep losses to coyotes and cannot substantiate the sheepmen's figures.

On Sept. 16 Russell E. Train, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), after considering evidence from 4 days of public hearings, ordered the M-44 registered and approved for use by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and six western states. HSUS participated in the hearings and opposed the M-44 system.

In a 46-page decision, Train expressed misgivings over the renewed use of the M-44. "I am concerned about the accidental exposure and potential injury to operating personnel . . ." he said. "I am even more concerned about the possibility of involuntary exposure, where the public generally (and especially children) may happen upon a device and unknowingly or irresponsibly be attracted to it, even though precautions are established to minimize this risk."

Train, while approving registration of the M-44, included in the order a list of 26 restrictions designed to protect nontarget and endangered species, prevent environmental contamination by the poison, avoid injury to human beings, and generally prevent abuse of the device by users. While the restrictions are somewhat encouraging, HSUS questions



The coyote: Open Season Again

whether they will have significant beneficial effect, since the M-44s will be handed out to ranchers in great numbers with little or no government effort made to monitor and enforce proper use of the device. The entire scheme of M-44 use that EPA has approved depends heavily upon the good faith and prudence of private ranchers whose fundamental interests lie with their own profits, not wildlife preservation.

Woolgrowers, faced with increased competition from synthetic fiber manufacturers, are struggling for survival. A highly placed Interior official said in a telephone interview that predators are not responsible for the decline in the sheep industry. "They have not been modernizing to maximize their market potential. The ranchers attribute their decline to predator problems because sheep losses are visible to the rancher and national markets are not. So he blames the predator," he said. Interior is hoping to help the failing sheep industry by conducting over 120 research projects throughout the U. S. to determine the best method of controlling the coyote, he said. Methods such as sound deterrents, chemicals, and coyote birth control are being explored. □

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USDA Scores Army On Laboratory Cages

An inspection conducted by U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) officials of the laboratory where the Army conducts chemical tests on beagles and other animals has confirmed HSUS's assessment that housing conditions for the animals are unsatisfactory.

HSUS Director of Animal Sheltering and Control Phyllis Wright inspected animal quarters at the Edgewood, Md., chemical warfare research facility in June after it was announced that the Army was purchasing more beagles to use in research. Miss Wright and Warren Brodrick, executive director of the Humane Society of Harford County, Md., concluded that the housing facilities did not meet standards established by the Animal Welfare Act of 1970.

Whereas Edgewood and all other federal facilities are exempted from provisions of the act, the 1970 law requires all federal facilities to maintain equivalent standards. USDA, which enforces other provisions of the act, is given no authority to enforce this latter provision.

As a result of the publicity from Miss Wright and Brodrick's visit, Edgewood officials asked USDA to inspect the facility. The voluntary inspection was conducted in August by Dr. D. F. Schwindaman, senior staff veterinarian of the Animal Care Staff of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and Dr. John A. Acree, veterinarian in charge of the district that includes Edgewood.

The primary USDA findings, which HSUS gained access to under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, agreed with Miss Wright's. They included these:

- Wire grid floors in beagle cages pose threat of injury to the dogs' feet.
- Cages for rhesus monkeys too small in both floor space and height.
- Ventilation inadequate in one of the buildings.

The USDA inspectors concluded that new buildings should be constructed to assure long-term compliance with the Animal Welfare Act. They rated the facility as providing above average care and treatment, with no major discrepancies noted. □