Cougars, Bears, Wolves and Poison

BY SALLY MACKLER, WILDLIFE ISSUE COORDINATOR

Cougars and Bears: Baited and Hounded Again

For the first time since 1994, hunters will again be running cougars and bears up trees with dog packs for easy killing, and luring bears into close range with bait buckets. As of February, hunters appointed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will be exempt from Oregon law prohibiting both of these unsporting and cruel practices.

After testimony and letters from the Club and other concerned parties, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission at least closed the loophole left open by the Department of Fish and Wildlife which would have allowed hunters with animal and domestic abuse records and wildlife violations to be eligible to act as agents of the state and use bait and hounds.

Until next legislative session, when we hope to see measures introduced to improve Oregon’s flawed and extremely lethal Cougar Management Plan, this is the best we could hope for in terms of mitigating the state’s killing of cougars. A lawsuit has been filed by conservation organizations aimed at federal agents who are also killing as part of the Plan.

Female Wolf Moves from Idaho into Oregon Just in Time!

In January a female wolf radio collared in Idaho was positively identified in the Wallowa mountains of eastern Oregon. She crossed the Idaho state line just before the Bush administration adopted the notorious “10j” rule, which gives Idaho, Montana and Wyoming the go ahead to kill over half the Rocky Mountain wolf population. The Sierra Club and other conservation groups immediately filed a suit challenging implementation of the rule. The rule allows states to kill federally protected wolves if they “impact” elk populations.

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Western Turf Wars

BOOK REVIEW BY ANDY CAPFER

Have you ever stopped to think seriously about what it means to “protect” wildlands? In 1964 the passage of the Wilderness Act promised a “just leave it be, stupid” revolution in protection and management of the wild. Now, almost a half century later, with half the biomass of the planet harnessed for human use, the results are in, and we’re scratching our heads staring at what is now only a tattered blanket of evolutionary potential, wondering what the Hell happened.

What happened is that everything we didn’t protect got wasted and what’s left stands at the precipice of climate crisis mega-disasters. All by themselves, the postage stamp wilderness areas don’t stand a chance. Is there even a future for evolution itself?

Oh, and by the way, what about all the cows?

In the midst of war, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, AIDS and the sixth great extinction, Sierra Club Grazing Committee Vice-Chair Mike Hudak is scampering around, jumping up and down, waving his arms over his head yelling at us: “Look at the freakin’ cows, man!”

He’s talking about the cows and other livestock that 24,548 operators are grazing on 230,000,000 acres of public wildlands managed by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in the 17 western states. One hundred and forty years of impact that by the late 1980s eliminated more than half of the plant species on 66% of Forest Service and 78% of BLM rangelands. Taxpayer-subsidized extinction as a way of life.

In his new book of interviews with land managers and activists, “Western Turf Wars,” Hudak discusses an evolution-churning cowboy mythology and culture of corruption run rampant, still winking at us from our most powerful politicians. Think of Reagan and Bush when they strut around in boots and cowboy hats showing off their so-called “ranches.”

The real problem is our collective support of the myth itself that undercuts efforts to protect public lands. So far 114 species of fish, 82 species of mammals, 58 species of birds, 35 species of amphibians and reptiles, 23 mollusks, and 12 species of insects have been adversely affected by a used-car-lot system of management. As BLM Resource Area Manager Dave Koehler saw it, “Every time there’s a Republican administration, it seems like there’s a rush to rape and pillage our natural resources.”

The tales of terror that Hudak has assembled run through the mind like a wil- derness sniper film. The story is a familiar one. Resource extractors bully the land managers into lining up with the legislators to acquire privileged access to public lands. They keep below cost fees so low they are in effect welfare for ranchers, and they feign bogus compliance with paltry environmental regulations.

Some district rangers, according to retired Forest Service Regional Director Bill Worl, have no “understanding of watershed and range ecology at all,” and don’t want to know about it, ignoring or burying photographic range studies going back to the 1930s. Take Edie Asrow, the district ranger for the Warner Mountain Ranger District in California, who refuses to compare current range conditions with those documented in studies from 1949 and 1959, and instead proclaiming that, “The Forest Service is thinking from here forward, not going back.”

Retired Forest Service District Ranger Don Omar insists that such studies near Goose Creek confirmed that 317 acres of soil had been lost from a mile-long gully over 30 years from grazing. Oman calculated the massive soil loss as “4.5 dump truck loads a day for 30 years.”

Conscientious ranchers who strive to enforce environmental laws sometimes find themselves and their careers attacked in their own communities and from corrupt superiors within the agencies. When Dave Koehler tried to shut down a New Mexico operation in which 28 individuals were running 880 cows on a BLM single-use permit allotted for 208 cows, the BLM deputy state director investigated Koehler for “illegal and inappropriate” activities and audited his program for over a month, going through all of his files and interviewing all of his employees.

This is all compounded by the fact that we are paying big bucks for all this devastation. The 2004 shortfall of Forest Service and BLM grazing receipts cost taxpayers $115,000,000.

Now the evidence is in, and Mike Hudak has collected the verdict straight from the mouths of the jurors for us to read in this fine collection. The judgment is unequivocal. As Forest Service Fire Management Officer Jim Prunty put it, “The worst possible use for this western country is livestock grazing.”

Despite all of this, public awareness remains low. Mike Hudak and the National Grazing Committee are revising legislative proposals for a voluntary buy-out of grazing permits to permanently remove the livestock from our public lands and then restore the lands. Your informed input and eagerness can make this issue a priority for the Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org/grazing). Make this issue a priority for the Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org/grazing). Mike’s interview videos are online at www.mikehudak.com/videos. You can buy the book (hardcover, 396 pages, includes bibliography and index) for $26.95 plus $4 shipping at www.westernturfwars.com or from Mike Hudak, PhD at c/o Biome Books, 38 Oliver St., Binghamton, NY 13904-1516.

EPA Petitioned to Ban Super Toxins Used to Target Predators

Conservationists have put increased pressure on the federal government to ban two deadly poisons used by ranchers to poison predators. Sodium cyanide, used in M-44 devices, and sodium fluoroacetate or 1080, used in livestock protection collars, are classified as Category 1, the highest level toxicants, by the EPA. They are tasteless, colorless, water soluble and deadly.

M-44s are spring-loaded devices that are baited with substances such as tallow to attract canids. When an animal tvags at the bait a pellet of poison is ejected into the mouth where it becomes lodged in the lungs and violently kills within two minutes. Dogs, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, wolves, opossums, marmots, raccoons, skunks, condors, bears and even birds have been killed by M-44s.

M-44s are used in Oregon by the USDA’s Wildlife Services to kill coyotes. The devices kill indiscriminately and have even been set on private property without the knowledge of the property owner. EPA records document USDA employees and unsuspecting citizens poisoned by sodium cyanide.

Livestock protection collars are not used in Oregon. Thanks to Oregon Senator Kitzhaber who banned the use of 1080 in Oregon. The poison was banned in 1972 by President Nixon but brought back by President Reagan. Sodium fluoroacetate (1080) keeps on killing by secondary poisoning scavengers feeding on poisoned carcasses. Death by 1080 is prolonged and painful, taking up to 15 hours.

There is no justification for exposing wildlife and people to these super tox- ins. According to national agricultural surveys, less than 3% of sheep mortality can be attributed to predation versus 5% due to other causes; less than 1% of cattle deaths are due to predation versus 3% to other causes.

Congressman Peter DeFazio, has introduced HR4775 to ban both 1080 and sodium cyanide. Contact your federal representatives and ask them to support this most recent effort of DeFazio to ban these super toxins.

Your involvement is crucial to the many species struggling for survival and protection. Please give a little bit of your time to help wildlife locally and across the country as part of the Sierra Club’s growing focus on wildlife. Con- tact the Wallow at wildlife@oregon.sierraclub.org to get on our wildlife alert list now; don’t wait!

For the Warner Mountain Ranger District in California, who refuses to compare current range condi- tions with those documented in studies from 1949 and 1959, and instead exclaiming that, “The Forest Service is thinking from here forward, not going back.”