

Dear board of supervisors,

I am a 4th generation Mendocino County Resident and have been shearing sheep in Mendocino County for over 20 years. Having seen the incredible landscape diversity of Mendocino County and how sheep fit into it, I would like to share a few thoughts. Nearly all of my customers first use non-lethal means to keep their sheep alive, but occasionally lethal means are necessary so I support the IWDM program. I would like to discuss the limitations of non-lethal predator control.

When project Coyote shared their video with the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors years ago, the landscape that they showed was gently rolling hills with very little except grass and forbs. It was very similar to the sheep pastures that I worked in at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where non-lethal methods were effectively and exclusively used. In this environment non-lethal methods are easy; perimeter fences are easy to maintain, sheep densities are generally about 4 times higher than most of Mendocino County so expensive fencing is affordable, and the lack of brush makes it easy for guard dogs to see the whole flock keeping it safer.

With the exception of a few coastal acres, none of Mendocino County looks like this. This spring 5 out of 5 of my customers in the vicinity of Westport lost all or most their sheep to a mountain lion in spite of non-lethal methods being employed. Fences were jumped, guardian dogs weren't quick enough, and animals were killed very near houses where people slept. It is because of exceptional predators like this that make lethal methods a necessary backup.

Additionally, It has been more than 60 years since broadcast burning has been commonplace here in Mendocino County. We can see that in the brush cover on the hills around us. Shephard's lane is an example like so many others. It was once an operating sheep ranch but is now so overgrown it is primed for a conflagration. Sheep mitigate the fire risk in places like this, but using exclusively non-lethal methods of predator control would be impossible there. We need to do all we can to maintain more herds of herbivores on the landscape, and graze new areas where feasible. Please make sure ranchers have all the tools possible.

Matthew Gilbert