

**To: Honorable Board of Supervisors, Mendocino County**

**RE: Agenda item to consider terminating the contract with USDA Wildlife Services.**

The proposal to cancel the cooperative service agreement with the USDA Wildlife Services program and limit the replacement program through the county Animal Care Services to only wildlife exclusionary work is short sided.

Through the cooperative service agreement with Wildlife Services the county integrated wildlife damage management program (IWDM) can continue to use both non-lethal and lethal means in order to assist property owners, businesses, private citizens and other agencies in resolving wildlife damage issues. Non-lethal technical assistance is needed and often helps to improve wildlife damage situations, but there are times when lethal alternatives are required. Limiting a IWDM program to only non-lethal options is a disservice to the residents of the county who could face situations with wildlife damage that are unresolvable without a lethal option administered by a trained professional such as Wildlife Services staff.

Those of us who make their living in agriculture cannot afford to have the losses that will occur if the large predators go unchecked in this rural County. Over population of these large predators will begin to impact cities such as Ukiah, Fort Bragg, Mendocino, and Willits when the predators move in to the towns to get easy pickings such as garbage and house pets because their natural habitat is over-run or impacted by human encroachment. In Covelo, on the valley floor and in the mountains, we deal with bear, mountain lions, bobcats, feral hogs, elk, coyotes, golden and bald eagles, buzzards and ravens, and roaming dogs. Most of the time it is a peaceful existence where the scavengers clean up the natural losses on a ranch. However, when a problem bear, cat, coyote, or pack of dogs starts knocking down healthy animals steps must be taken. USDA Wildlife Services can provide non-lethal means of eradicating the problem. If that does not deter the predator, then lethal means must be employed or severe losses may be sustained, not to mention stress on the entire herd when they are stirred up protecting their young or fighting off the predators, which reduces performance, can lead to younger animals being trampled and injured, and may reduce immunities leading to susceptibility to disease outbreaks. In the past several years our ranch has lost calves and had them maimed by bear and eagles. Roaming dogs have chased deer, elk, and cattle across our pastures and stirred up the cattle while they are defending their young. Roaming dogs, coyotes, bobcats, feral hogs, and even bear have come in very close and have been in the field with our horses 100 feet from our house. Coyotes and bear leave their scat right in our driveway around our shop and house and the coyotes have killed our very young kittens or older outdoor cats. One yearling heifer was chased into and over a fence and hung by her hind leg over night in the snow a couple winters ago. She took weeks of care to get her standing and months of care to get her back grazing with her herd. After all that stress, her fertility was impacted and she did not breed when she should have, so she was sent to the livestock sales yard, where she sold very cheaply because she was missing her tail, her ear had frozen off, she had white hair scars on her side where her hide had slipped and she was lame in a hind foot. Before her trauma, she

was one of the highest quality animals in her age group. That situation was likely roaming dogs, but could have been a mountain lion or bear.

The agenda item does not provide any information on what types of wildlife species or wildlife interaction issues this newly consolidated Animal Care staffing unit will address, nor does the presentation provide any analysis on the overall costs for the increased staff, facility improvements, vehicles, equipment and training that will be required as part of this proposal. It seems to me that the Animal Care staffing unit already has its hands full with abandoned and lost dogs, cats and controlling those populations, without subjecting them to hours traveling to remote locations in Mendocino County and the training necessary to capture and relocate large predators or utilize other non-lethal means of prevention. I read a couple years ago that most of the interactions for the trappers were skunks and raccoons in the populated areas of Mendocino County. When Wildlife Services are called to help with a problem large predator or to investigate a rancher's cattle or sheep loss, their expertise is valued. The Animal Control truck and staff would be of limited value in these situations.

Thank you,

Tina Wilson

Covelo