

October 31, 2000

Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, California 94901

SUBJECT:

Approve five-year action plan for livestock/wildlife protection programs. Execute agreement No. 00-73-06-0259-RA with USDA, Wildlife Services. Approve Marin County Strategic Plan for Wildlife Control Techniques on Livestock Operations. Authorize funds for non-lethal predator control program.

Dear Supervisors:

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve five-year action plan to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate a sustainable livestock/wildlife protection program. Approve Marin County Strategic Plan for Wildlife Control Techniques on Livestock Operations (attached). Approve USDA Cooperative Agreement in the amount of \$30,000 and authorize the President of the Board to sign agreement. Include \$50,000 in 361-2267 (Special Projects) to fund Northbay Woolgrowers Association to implement non-lethal predator control activities.

SUMMARY:

Five Year Action Plan:

Protecting livestock from depredation is a complex endeavor, requiring a unique assessment of the legal, social, economic, biological, and technical aspects. During the past five years, this program has been laden with acrimony, fueled by disputes, legal challenges, budget debates, animal losses; both livestock and wildlife. There has been little consensus following numerous meetings between ranchers and animal protection interest groups. This lack of consensus has disrupted the county's platform of ideas, activities, and directives designed to bring a social, biological and economic balance to the program. This plan sets a course of action to sustain the viability of sheep production in the county. The plan sets forth steps to develop, fund, implement, and evaluate activities over a five-year period. The chronology of events is designed to facilitate change to resolve the conflicts between agricultural producers and animal protection organizations.

The following is a summary of the five-year action plan:

Fiscal Year

Proposed Activities Approved

2000/01

- USDA Contract - \$30,000.
(1/2 year cost - \$15,000).
- County Strategic Plan.
- Funding for non-lethal program:
Northbay Woolgrowers Association -
\$50,000.
- Program monitoring, analysis, and
evaluation report.

(Lethal and non-lethal elements run concurrently for 18 months as a necessary bridge to future program.)

2001/02

- USDA/County contract with sunset
provision. \$30,000.
- Evaluate county involvement in non-
lethal activities.
- Evaluate County Strategic Plan.
- Funding for non-lethal program: i.e.
Northbay Woolgrowers Association.
\$50,000.
- USDA negotiates 2002/03 contract
with ranchers.

(USDA/County contract ends, all county funds move for non-lethal activities as ranchers take over contract with USDA.)

2002/03

- USDA/County Contract sunsets.
- USDA/Rancher Contract initiated.

- Funding for non-lethal programs: i.e. Northbay Woolgrowers Association. \$50,000.
- Continue support of non-lethal activities as justified through analysis.
- Evaluate Strategic Plan

2003/04

- Support non-lethal programs as justified through analysis.
- Funding for non-lethal programs i.e. Northbay Woolgrowers Association.

2004/05

- Evaluate adopted changes.
- Evaluate program needs.
- Sunset program elements as required.

The plan is to run a lethal and non-lethal program concurrently for the next 18 months. During this period, the County will pay more, not less, to support livestock producers. This support should continue throughout the five-year plan, following year-to-year program evaluation. At the end of fiscal year 2001/02, the USDA/County contract will sunset. The contract for USDA services will then be transferred and assumed by the Northbay Woolgrowers Association or other industry group as required. The County of Marin would continue supporting non-lethal activities, i.e. funding for Northbay Woolgrowers Association and/or other related activities as determined appropriate. Any wildlife services or stock protection program authorized would be monitored, analyzed, and evaluation reports prepared and reviewed to determine the effectiveness and value of the respective program.

The County of Marin should endorse activities listed above in order to adopt a sustainable livestock protection program. Increasing the county commitment for non-lethal activities is recommended. The chronology of events would allow for the implementation, integration, study, and documentation of non-lethal and lethal control methods and determine the respective success and cost of the lethal and non-lethal program elements.

USDA Wildlife Services Program:

This past fiscal year presented many challenges in this program. The following is a brief summary of the year's activities:

- Board of Supervisors approves USDA Agreement, Strategic Plan, and establishes cost share program funding.
- Ranchers and USDA object to strategic plan mandates on restricting options to protect livestock.

- USDA identifies legal conflicts with Strategic Plan and does not sign agreement.
- Wildlife Services Specialist resigns position over uncertainty of program funding.
- Board of Supervisors amends strategic plan in response to ranchers' request.
- Strategic Plan rewritten to gain consensus among ranchers, USDA, and interest groups.

The proposed contract with USDA is a standard agreement with all work activities carried out with the terms of the cooperative agreement No. 00-73-06-0259-RA. This is a cost sharing agreement to provide for an integrated animal damage management program on properties within the County of Marin. County cost for this agreement is \$30,000. USDA costs are \$30,000. Total contract cost is \$60,000. Funding provides for a full-time Wildlife Services Specialist who performs a full range of education, support, and technical assistance for the public. Personnel, equipment, services and supplies, and vehicle are supplied by USDA. Actual cost for activities this fiscal year will be approximately \$15,000. (1/2 year).

The cooperative Wildlife Services program is a Federal, State, and County partnership that utilizes cooperative problem solving to strengthen the State's Wildlife damage management, and human health and safety activities. The cooperative program offers the residents of Marin County an official source of professional assistance to resolve human/wildlife conflicts. This program and the availability of assistance reduces the likelihood unskilled citizens will resort to "home remedies" that could adversely affect the animals, environment, and non-target species. Without the cooperative program there would be an alarming increase in the number of wildlife damage incidents; resulting in an increase in human health and safety threats, as well as property, agricultural, and natural resource and endangered species losses. I propose that the USDA contract sunset at the end of fiscal year 2001/02.

Strategic Plan:

The County of Marin should adopt the Strategic Plan for 2000 in order to adopt a sustainable livestock protection program. The Strategic Plan is the most progressive plan of its type in existence. Marin County has received national and state recognition for the plan.

The unveiling of the 1999 Strategic Plan for Livestock and Predator Control was not well received by animal protection groups, ranchers, and USDA. Lacking full support from stakeholders, the plan objectives and strategies were not fully implemented.

During this past year, I met with all stakeholders to discuss the preparation of the Strategic Plan for the year 2000. The plan was modified to gain consensus and support from ranchers, USDA, and to some extent, animal protection groups. Ranchers and USDA are in consensus. The animal protection groups voiced the following issues and concerns about the revised strategic plan:

- The animal protection groups support the removal of predators that attack livestock.
- They want non-target, unintentional animal takes to be reduced or eliminated.
- They want assurance that non-lethal controls are adopted by ranchers.

- The plan is not time specific to complete various objectives.

They support implementing all feasible alternatives before a lethal control is adopted. This particular recommendation is consistent with current ranch management practices. As you are aware, ranchers have secure fences and many have guardian animals in operation. These are critical in the success of maintaining livestock. Ranchers do meet the standard of implementing non-lethal activities. Neither ranchers, nor USDA, are interested in removing animals that are not predators. The Marin County Department of Agriculture budget for fiscal year 2000/01 includes staff time to oversee implementation of the plan. The strategic plan for 2000 places responsibility with the Agricultural Commissioner to implement the following to encourage non-lethal controls:

- Coordinate efforts with ranchers, and producers, to implement non-lethal management practices.
- Inform the ranchers of the county's cost share program.
- Coordinate and attend training classes and annual meetings with ranchers.
- Identify additional funding sources to implement projects.
- Work with the livestock producers to evaluate the effectiveness of non-lethal practices.
- Ranchers and the Agricultural Commissioner to jointly report to the County Supervisors yearly.
- Work with ranchers to encourage and assist in voluntary livestock protection plans in conjunction with the cost share program for fencing and guardian animals.
- Assist in teaching and demonstrating exclusion improvements and habitat modification.

Funding for Non-lethal Program Activities:

Northbay Woolgrowers Association:

The Northbay Woolgrowers Association should receive monetary support for their past, present, and future efforts for implementation of non-lethal activities on ranches. The ranchers are being asked to perform the most progressive livestock management practices to reduce or eliminate dispatching predators. They are also being asked to protect wildlife on their ranches. These goals require innovation, research, and include exclusion and repelling techniques. The construction of appropriate fencing and purchase of guard animals is expensive and requires continuous management. I recommend the County support the Northbay Woolgrowers Association by funding their association to implement non-lethal program activities. They are well suited to identify their members individual ranch needs through assessment and projects for each ranch. They may chose to work with non-profit groups, such as Little Blue Society or private companies to perform repairs and purchase of appropriate non-lethal tools, equipment, and personnel.

For example, the Little Blue Society: A non-profit, independent, non-adversarial group called the "Little Blue Society" (LBS) has proposed a plan to implement non-lethal program activities. There are three elements to their proposal.

- 1.) Building Fences/Building Communities: Exclusion fence properly constructed and maintained, can aid significantly in reducing predation, as well as increasing the effectiveness of guard animals. They propose pre-existing fences be fortified to prevent entry from predators and special additions be made to enhance the predator-detering ability of the fences and its effectiveness for controlling sheep.
- 2.) Guardian Shepherds: The Guardian Shepherd Program (GS) is ecologically sound. It incorporates the traditional art of shepherding with a modern twist. The Guardian Shepherds are persons who are specially trained by wildlife experts at Little Blue Society as sentinels providing protection to flocks of sheep by using techniques developed by LBS.

Little Blue Society's Guardian Shepherd Program brings together proven coyote deterrents in a unique and creative way to enhance and boost efficacy in protection of sheep. The feature that distinguishes the Guardian Shepherd Program from almost every other alternative method of protecting sheep is that while it provides maximum protection. It is intended to modify the coyotes behavior to choose natural prey over predation of domesticated sheep.

The Guardian Shepherds are either domestic or imported workers from Mexico, Chile, Peru, or Mongolia. They go through a special 16-hour training program with Little Blue Society where they are instructed in strategic patrolling, coyote vexing and novel visual stimuli. These are all methodologies developed by Little Blue Society in order to deter coyotes, and other predators from areas where their presence and/or activities may cause damage to property and create human safety issues.

- 3.) Community Outreach and Preventative Strategy: An educational/informational meeting will be provided, with a panel discussion by wildlife experts well versed in coyote ecology, and the most current methods in predation damage prevention allowing for safe and peaceful coexistence with the coyote. Little Blue Society tailors and implements proactive conflict resolution strategies. Little Blue Society's staff will work with the Agricultural Commissioner to conduct walk-through investigations of areas currently experiencing problems from predation, and recommend necessary modifications to prevent future

damage. Little Blue Society will provide a comprehensive report with recommended changes on each property as part of the damage mitigation consultation.

The Northbay Woolgrowers Association may determine these activities would be beneficial and could work with Little Blue Society to implement their proposal.

Privatizing Predator Control:

If a county-wide coordinated predator control program was not available to ranchers, they would resort to privatizing predator control. Privatizing predator control could increase use of lethal devices, increase indiscriminate taking of non-target animals, including endangered species. Privatizing predator control would eliminate the ability to supervise activities, maintain public records of control activities, and could potentially increase legal problems between property owners over predator control. Disputes over control activities will likely end up in the legal system for resolution. Private programs are likely to include a bounty system for predators where ranchers pay for each predator removed from their property. Without a county program already, some ranchers are using the bounty system to remove predators from their property. Privatizing predator control would make reporting of livestock, and wildlife losses and damage, speculative at best. There would be inadequate supervision and no incentive for implementing non-lethal control alternatives. There would be no rancher education and training programs. There would be no Strategic Plans to guide the program.

County Operated Predator Control Program:

The Coalition for California Wildlife issued a position paper, dated August 2000, to the Board of Supervisors, requesting the Board cancel its contract with USDA and establish a county operated predator management program.

The Coalition suggests in their report that Marin County should join other California counties, including Tulare, Fresno, and Kings, that have opted for local control by establishing their own program not affiliated with USDA. These programs include all the legal lethal control techniques available to ranchers. These counties have chosen to pay for a program that is even more responsive to their ranchers' needs, beyond the services offered by USDA. These counties opted to hire their own predator control specialist(s) in order to deal quickly with predators. These programs do not have a strategic plan and do not have a cost-share program.

In the case of Fresno County, the county accepts some fees from their agricultural community and the county does the lethal controls. I do not think the Coalition would support Marin County operating a lethal type of program in Marin County mirrored after Fresno's program. The cost of a local program would far exceed the current USDA program cost. Estimated program cost would be \$150,000 in the first year, and about \$100,000/year thereafter. In addition, ranchers may not respond positively to a county operated program. The ranchers fear the program would leave them without any means to deal effectively with predators. The need to control predators when they are killing multiple numbers ewes, some pregnant, and lambs is critical to them. When killing occurs, telling a rancher he should get another guard dog is not the information he needs to hear. There are very few predators taken by USDA. Generally, when predators are removed, livestock losses cease and depredation is curtailed at that site for long periods of time.

I do not recommend the County operate a predator control program.

Cost Share/Grant Program:

The program was not implemented last year because there was no USDA contract. Ranchers wanted USDA in the field to assist with implementing a cost share program. Because the cost share program stalled, a non-working relationship between ranchers, County, and USDA resulted. The Board subsequently delayed approval of the \$20,000 cost share funding during the Marin County Budget Hearings on July 18, 2000. At that time, it was recommended the funding be delayed until the Board adopts a strategic plan for predator control. The cost share program is voluntary and is designed to assist ranchers with fence repairs and the purchase of guardian animals to reduce livestock losses caused by predator attacks.

I do not recommend the county operate a cost share program. I do recommend the county fund Northbay Wool Growers Association to implement non-lethal activities.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Agreement with USDA is \$30,000. Funding Northbay Woolgrowers non-lethal programs is \$50,000.

Summary:

Cost -- Fiscal Year 2000/01		
USDA	-- _ Year	\$15,000
NBWG	--	<u>50,000</u>
		Total: \$65,000
Cost -- Fiscal Year 2001/02		
USDA	-- Full Year	\$30,000
NBWG	--	<u>50,000</u>
		Total: \$80,000
Cost -- Fiscal Year 2002/03		
USDA	--	\$ 0
NBWG	--	<u>50,000</u>
		Total: \$50,000

ALTERNATIVE TO RECOMMENDED ACTION:

1. No Wildlife Services Program:

Estimated cost: Unknown, cost for complaint investigations, and property loss.

PROS:

- No county cost for USDA Wildlife Services program.
- No program controversy

CONS:

- Reduce economic viability of Marin County Agriculture
- Loss of agricultural employment
- Loss of ranch heritage and sustainability
- Larger impacts to MALT ranches
- Privatizing predator controls
- Lose control of animal loss statistics
- No education, training, and research opportunities
- Create conflicts between ranchers
- Lose producer's support for seeking control alternatives
- Loss of best management practices and uniformity
- Liability and excessive cost of privatizing activities
- Potentially greater impacts on non-target animals, endangered species, and environment.
- Likely to result in the bounty system which takes animals indiscriminately.

2. County Operated Program.

Estimated cost: \$150,000. Staffing, vehicle, office, field equipment, ATV specialty equipment, tools, guns, dogs, etc.

PROS:

- Board oversight of field activities
- Funding to assist implementation of program
- Develop and set policies to control monitor, and implement program
- Greater controls over protecting wildlife and endangered species
- Responsible for maintaining statistics

CONS:

- Excessive costs for personnel and supplies
 - No support from ranching community
 - Ordinance, policies, and rules to be prepared
 - Environmental assessments possibly required
 - Controversy over lethal program components
3. USDA/Marin Cooperative Program (Existing Program).
Program costs: \$30,000 for contract.

PROS:

- Strategic plan agreed to by USDA/Marin County/ranchers
- Control predators when attacks occur
- Maintain records of activities
- Use best management practices
- Proven education and training
- Uniformity of activities on all ranches
- Coordinate with other agencies, including the University of California
- Northbay woolgrowers and ranchers support program
- Protection of endangered species a priority
- Program costs are locked in at \$30,000
- Reports on activities available to the public
- Alternative, non-lethal methods implemented

- Assistance to protect property and other resources
- Continue meeting with Animal Protection Groups, Humane Society, ranchers, USDA, County and other agencies to provide program oversight

CONS:

- Controversy about expenditures on lethal components of the program
- Concern for wildlife losses through unintentional takes

4. Privatize Program.

Estimated cost: unknown, complaint investigation, impacts to non-targets other than wildlife, concerns about a bounty system.

PROS:

- No county direct cost
- No county involvement

CONS:

- No government program oversight
- No statistics and reports
- Possible impacts to wildlife and non-target animals
- No education program
- No training programs
- No research and university extension
- No best management practices
- Possible liabilities and illegal activities
- No support from North Bay Woolgrowers and ranchers
- No community involvement in program review
- Bounty System

5. County pays for livestock killed by predators.

Estimated cost; \$40,000 TO \$160,000

PROS:

- All losses of livestock paid
- No program oversight, only confirmation and accounting procedures
- No controversy regarding predation program and lethal activities

CONS:

- Ranchers do not want to lose animals, but want to protect them from predator attacks
- Protecting and caring for livestock is paramount
- Ranchers want a program that offers all the elements of livestock protection
- They do not want to stand by and see a slaughter of animals and get paid for that activity

DISCUSSION: I am hopeful this next year will present a different set of challenges by focusing on a sincere effort by ranchers and the County to implement the Strategic Plan activities. Contracting with Little Blue Society will assist in the efforts by the County to promote non-lethal activities. It will give ranchers valuable tools to protect livestock during the transition from USDA/County contracting to a position in order to assist ranchers with their needs to protect livestock

REVIEWED BY: () Auditor-Controller (X) N/A
 () County Counsel (X) N/A
 () Human Resources (X) N/A

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy K. Carlsen
 Agricultural Commissioner
 Director of Weights and Measures

SKC/jv
 wd:contracts/USDA rancher contract