



Field Reports and Commentary

The War on Predators in Western Canada Kills Martens, Fishers and Wolverines

Gilbert PROULX, Alpha Wildlife Research & Management Ltd, 229 Lilac Terrace, Sherwood Park, Alberta, T8H 1W3, Canada. gproulx@alphawildlife.ca

There is a new trend in western Canada: killing large and medium-sized predators to protect big game and livestock. In the last 15 years, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) has promoted the killing of wolves through shooting and strychnine poisoning to allegedly recover the threatened Little Smoky boreal caribou population (Hervieux *et al.* 2014). The agency also incited trappers to trap wolves in Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division Districts encompassing caribou range.

While these measures did not result in an increase in caribou abundance – likely because habitat loss and deterioration are the true factors impacting their numbers (Brook *et al.* 2015, Proulx 2015) instead of wolf predation (Kuzik *et al.* 2006)– the use of strychnine baits and snares resulted in the loss of hundreds of non-target animals. The recovery of carcasses in the field, and data collected from voluntary submissions by trappers indicated that at least 175 fishers and 38 wolverines were accidentally snared or poisoned since 2000 – this is, of course, a minimum (AESRD 2012, Hervieux *et al.* 2014).

Strychnine bait sites were checked only every 8 days on average to recover the carcasses of animals that were poisoned (Hervieux *et al.* 2014). Many animals may die away from the bait site or be picked up by scavengers, who in turn would be killed through secondary poisoning. In the case of snaring, many trappers do not bother reporting non-target catches.

Since 2007, predator control probably had an impact on martens, fishers and wolverines as Alberta and Saskatchewan municipalities established wolf and coyote bounties in areas where ranches are adjacent to forests, particularly near the Canadian Rockies and along the northern boreal forest (Proulx and Rodtka 2015). Farmers have access to Compound 1080 baits and snares to poison and capture wolves and coyotes, for which they receive a bounty of \$ 15 per animal killed (Proulx and Rodtka 2015). This year, I initiated a study of wolf and coyote food habits in counties with bounties, and I found that other predators such as cougars and fishers were being captured in snares. Wolverines are most likely captured in snares set near the Canadian Rockies, but there is no mandatory reporting (Newman 2016).

Although the use of strychnine baits (Proulx *et al.* 2015a) and neck killing snares (Proulx *et al.* 2015b) is inhumane and non-selective, the war on predators in Alberta and Saskatchewan reminds us of the 1950s' campaigns to poison all predators to counteract a rabies outbreak (Ballantyne 1958, Boumez 1989). Such a program resulted in the decimation of many species, including fishers (Douglas and Strickland 1987) and wolverines (Kelsall 1981). It took many decades for some of these species to re-establish themselves in their original distribution range. However, today's Alberta and Saskatchewan predator control programs could regionally endanger, once again, the persistence of some American marten, fisher and wolverine populations.

Field Reports and Commentary

The War on Predators in Western Canada Kills Martens, Fishers and Wolverines

Literature Cited, continued from Page 4

- Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resources (AESRD). 2012. Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development use of toxicants for wildlife management. Report, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Ballantyne, E.E. 1958. Rabies control in Alberta wildlife. *Veterinary Medicine* 23:87-91.
- Boumez, J. B. 1989. Coyote control in Alberta". Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop Proceedings. Paper 396. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.uni.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1395&context=gpwdcwp>
- Brook, R. K., M. Cattet, C. T. Darimont, P. C. Paquet, and G. Proulx. 2015. Maintaining ethical standards during conservation crises. *Canadian Wildlife Biology & Management* 4: 72-79.
- Douglas, C. W., and M. A. Strickland. 1987. Fisher. Pages 511-529 in M. J. Novak, E. Baker, M. E. Obbard, and B. Malloch, eds. Wild furbearer management and conservation in North America. Ontario Trappers Association, North Bay, Ontario, Canada.
- Hervieux, D., M. Hebblewhite, D. Stepnisky, M. Bacon, and S. Boutin. 2014. Managing wolves (*Canis lupus*) to recover threatened woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in Alberta. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 92: 1029-1037.
- Kelsall, J.P. 1981. Status report on the wolverine, *Gulo gulo*, in Canada in 1981. Report. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), Ottawa, Canada.
- Kuzyk, G. W., J. Jeff Kneteman, and F. K.A. Schmiegelow. 2006. Pack size of wolves, *Canis lupus*, on caribou, *Rangifer tarandus*, winter ranges in westcentral Alberta. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 120: 131-318.
- Newman, D. 2016. Wolf snares kill 15 cougars, eagle in central Alberta, spurring debate over hunting method. CBC News, Calgary. Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/wolf-snares-kill-cougars-sundre-1.3483278>
- Proulx, G., R. Brook, M. Cattet, C. Darimont, and P. C. Paquet. 2015a. Poisoning wolves with strychnine is unacceptable in experimental studies and conservation programmes. *Environmental Conservation* – doi:10.1017/S0376892915000211
- Proulx, G., and D. Rodtka. 2015. Predator bounties in Western Canada cause animal suffering and compromise wildlife conservation efforts. *Animals* 5: 1034-1046.

Proulx, G., D. Rodtka, M. W. Barrett, M. Cattet, D. Dekker, E. Moffatt, and R. A. Powell. 2015b. Humaneness and selectivity of killing neck snares used to capture canids in Canada: a review. *Canadian Wildlife Biology & Management* 4: 55-65.