

FEBRUARY 24, 1972

President Nixon's endorsement of the coyotes has silenced the Shortgrass populace. Our people don't seem to want to discuss the new order to prohibit the use of poison on federal lands. Only occasionally do you hear someone muttering about the act. As near as I can tell, however, the citizens are in favor of the President going to China. A neighbor was by the ranch yesterday, packing a fresh killed lamb that had a perfect set of teeth marks in the jugular area. He wanted a picture taken of the lamb. I suppose he figured his grandkids would like to know what a dead sheep looked like.

It's a cinch he didn't want the picture to dramatize the damage the coyotes are doing. He's too smart to waste his time in that manner. I'll throw in the picture with this column, but don't think for a minute that I think anyone except ranchers or their friends care if the coyotes make shish kabobs out of every sheep in the whole country.

Mr. Nixon didn't intend to out-and-out hurt the sheepmen by issuing the ban. I think the move was a test to see how stable the industry is. He'd be some sort of a leader if it turned out that the nation was depending on a business to produce food and fiber that couldn't withstand a few more thousand predators chewing on their flocks.

Presidents have to be certain that the basic industries are strong. It'd be a fine kettle of soybean cakes to get along about 1980 and discover that the last 1000 head of sheep were in the hands of a group of people that couldn't resist a coyote epidemic.

After all, the Secretary of Interior explained that the Administration was aware of the predator problem on both public and private lands. What more would you ask of a cabinet member?

Those kings that used to have their critics' heads chopped off didn't bother to ask what the cuttees' problems were. Old-time rulers were poorly informed. They'd just order the guillotine made ready, then whack off the heads and go on about the serious business of being king. I'll bet not one out of 50 monarchs ever knew whether the doomed ones had allergies or asthma. So don't say that the government didn't know what they were doing 'to us. It'll be your business if you want to say they didn't care what they did to us. But don't quote me as saying the rulers in Washington are indifferent to what happens to the sheep or the sheepmen. I can't fight off the ground squirrels around the barns, much less the amount of federal men that could show up on a moment's notice. So whatever you do or say, don't misquote me on the deal. I like having an informed Secretary of Interior.

Politically, the move was superb. The national association of beekeepers couldn't count the swarms of environmentalists that inhabit the United States. Nouveau nature lovers outnumber ranchers by a huge margin. So much noise has been made that everybody has forgotten that the ranchers love the land. So many rubber shod hikers have hit the outdoors that we have been lost in the clatter.

Nature clubs have flat stolen the scenery. From the way they have taken over, you'd think they were responsible for the safe passage of Noah's charges. Kids are growing up believing that song birds learned to sing at club meetings. Ten more years of the present program is going to find the local chapters of fauna and flora claiming they own the screen rights on the sunrises and sunsets. They are already acting like they own all the running water and the drifting clouds.

In a few months, politicians will make feeble efforts to gain the ranch vote. Two or three desperate hopefuls will try a little harder to get our support. In the meanwhile, we'll be expected to forget the inconveniences that they've imposed upon our ways of life. Politicians figure that the memory span of a voter is only about 30 seconds.

Herders are going to have a hard time finding a friend on the ballot. There's place for us in the world. So far, it's difficult to find.