

JANUARY 31, 1980

Up in the northwestern part of Colorado during the past hunting season, nine deer hunters saw a golden eagle knock down a juvenile whooping crane. The reason I think the report has been so late being released is that the authorities probably used up a lot of time grilling the hunters to be sure they weren't puffing out one of those big campfire fair tales like redcaps are known to do.

I am glad the story was delayed. It's going to take some thought to decide that call. Without polling my fellow sheepherders, I am willing to bet that wool and lamb raisers are going to come out 100 percent in support of the safety of juvenile whooping cranes.

Nowhere on this earth are you going to find a better place for sympathy against a falcon raking its claws down your back than among U.S. sheepmen. In fact, if I was a whooping crane chick, I'd hope and pray that my nest was close to a sheep outfit.

What I began to wonder is why we haven't nine deer hunters that would serve as credible witnesses to the eagles' depredation of our juvenile lambs and goats.

I've heard, but didn't believe, that the government program to capture and relocate eagles was working. Catching and moving in some honest hunters doesn't sound like much of a task compared to netting and shifting a wild bird's range.

It'd be as simple as finding a watering spot in the hunting country that has more than nine bar stools. Any trapper worth his downwind odor ought to be able to catch from a half-dozen to 24 head of redcaps a night merely by setting up a felt card table over a trap door.

We may have wasted a lot of time sending representatives to Washington and to the state capitals. Instead of running hunters off, we should have been cultivation them to testify.

Hunters are close observers of nature. Four or five years ago, one here at the ranch saw two timber wolves 400 miles from their natural range. It was the first of the big wolves to be seen in the area in 40 years.

Unfortunately, he was too excited to kill the beasts. I am unable to swear that he even saw the two wolves, but from the looks of imprints where he rolled and fell underneath his stand, I'd sure say that something traumatic happened to cause him to buck off his ammunition belt and scatter beer cans over about a 30 yard area.

The main thing that hurt was that he didn't shoot the wolves. I would love to have had two fresh wolf scalps to give my Indian wife. She'd have thrown a fit over two big old scalps with the eyes and the eyebrows attached. It would've been the best Christmas present I could have found. I'm still a little resentful toward that hunter for losing his head.

Eagles and cranes causing a controversy may not sound too important to people outside of the woolie industry. But to us the flicker of a birthday candle is a full blast of hope.

All the time that our country has been running short of petroleum products to make synthetic clothes, we have been trying to raise natural fibers against odds that'd shock a casino dealer.

For 30 years, we've been packing a load of government interference and environmental restrictions. Not a worthy outside of the wool states ever thought of our

extinction. Millions of acres of productive sheep ranges were turned over to the coyote pack. What was once a problem of a few herders became a problem for the whole society.

I am going to screen our hunters closer next year. The glib of tongue and the glint of imagination are going to command the choice leases. Too bad the balance of imports and the balance of nature are such close companions. I'll let you know how many juvenile lambs we contribute to the cause.