



## **Agricultural and Wildlife Damage Prevention Meeting Board Minutes**

4315 South 2700 East  
TSOB South Bldg, Floor 2  
Taylorsville, Utah 84129

Monday, April 28, 2025 @ 11:00 A.M.

**(00:35) Riley Peck** - board chairman, opened the meeting.

Following the opening, the board member introductions were made:

- **Kelly Pehrson**
- **John Shivik** (joined remotely)
- **Wyatt Selman**
- **John Bair**
- **Leann Hunting**
- **Allen Olsen**
- **Dan Peart**
- **Dave Cook**
- **Casey Earl**

Dave Cook was excused from the meeting due to other arrangements.

**(2:10)** The first action item was the approval of the minutes. A motion was made by Allen, seconded by Wyatt, and passed unanimously.

### **(2:42) Leann Hunting - Program History and Information Update**

Highlighting the Predator Control Board's evolution since 2019. She emphasized a shift towards greater board engagement in decision-making and policy development, moving beyond just informational reviews. She introduced Cole Selman as the program manager and also mentioned that Kelly Pearson is now the Commissioner of Agriculture and serves on the board, though he was excused from this meeting due to prior engagements.

### **(5:10) Luke Osborn - Program Year Summary**

Presented an overview of the UDAF's predator control efforts, focusing on ground take numbers. Osborn highlighted a significant shift in mountain lion management. Historically, trappers were hesitant to kill lions, often operating on a "corrective basis" after depredation incidents. Now, the directive is to be more bold. This change is in response to requests from the Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to focus more heavily on lions in specific deer units to support struggling mule deer populations. A board member inquired if lions are taken during aerial coyote hunts. Osborn clarified that while aerial hunting for coyotes is permitted, taking lions from the air is still prohibited. However, if a lion is spotted from the air, trappers can radio ground crews with dogs to pursue it. It was noted that there's no official tag for cougars

anymore; hunters only need a general hunting license. Osborn acknowledged that many lions are taken through "sportsman-assisted" efforts, where DWR personnel help sportsmen, including young hunters, locate and harvest lions. While these numbers are not directly tracked by UDAF trappers, they are reflected in the DWR's overall sportsman harvest data.

#### **(16:00) Tyler Bodily - 24/25 Aerial Update**

Predator control efforts, focusing on aerial coyote take numbers and the significant impact of thermal imaging. With the aid of thermal imaging, there was a 30% take increase compared to the previous year. Thermal imaging has revolutionized flying, making overcast days (previously undesirable) ideal for operations as thermal visibility is enhanced. This has drastically improved effectiveness, especially in open desert areas where previous "big days" yielded 10-15 coyotes, while now 20+ is routine, with some days seeing 40-50 coyotes. The program has also conducted flights for feral swine surveillance and eradication, particularly in Washington County.

The presentation concluded with a brief video showcasing thermal imaging from an aircraft during an overcast day, demonstrating its effectiveness even without direct daylight.

#### **(25:15) Annie Thackeray - DRC Bird Work Report**

Annie presented statistics on livestock protection and sage grouse protection. Annie emphasized they've already had to increase their permit limit this year, indicating a high volume of work. While the overall work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has gone well and hope to continue supporting the effort and meeting the increased demand for their services.

#### **(27:35) Jake Houtrouw - predator control budget review**

Covered both the current fiscal year and the upcoming fiscal year. The total budget for FY25 which covered all aspects of the program, including trappers' salaries and operational costs. Jake noted that the program received a one-time reallocation of \$250,000 from animal industry, which boosted this year's funds. A cooperative agreement with the Department of Wildlife Resources allocates funds for specific activities. Jake emphasized that the program is doing well in utilizing these funds, which are raised by the Department of Natural Resources and transferred upon request. Jake commended Cole and the trappers for their work in navigating the program's transition to a state-funded and operated model, stating that it has been a significant success. He expressed satisfaction with the program's financial standing and its overall progress.

#### **(36:05) Cole Selman - Aerial work proposals**

Outlined the program's priorities and proposed changes, The paramount concern for the program is the safety of its pilots and gunners. Cole highlighted how technological advancements, particularly in thermal imaging, have already significantly boosted coyote take numbers, essentially doubling their effectiveness in older aircraft.

The program currently uses two older, carbureted planes (nicknamed "old blue" and "yellow"), both over 53 years old. While they've served well, the desire is to upgrade to more modern, safer, and efficient aircraft to further improve productivity and safety. To attract a larger and higher-quality candidate pool, they are proposing a full-time seasonal pilot position with year-round state benefits. This aims to appeal to aerial pilots who typically work seasonally (e.g., crop dusting, firefighting) and are looking to accrue hours and benefits during the winter months. The program proposes moving its leased hangar from Brigham City to a more central location would reduce ferry times to various work sites across the state, especially those at higher elevations where conditions can be more challenging. The speaker introduced the idea of leasing an X-CUB aircraft as a significant upgrade. Unlike the current planes with a top speed of 90 mph, an X-CUB can ferry at 145-150 mph drastically reducing travel time. For example, a two-hour one-way ferry to the West Desert would be cut to one hour round trip, freeing up three hours of work time.

The proposal for the X-CUB lease, along with models for existing operations and an all-contractor model, will be submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget and then to the legislative fiscal analyst. If the X-CUB lease is approved, the sale of the existing planes would generate funds that would go into a restricted account. These funds could then be used to offset the monthly lease payments.

#### **(1:04) Lunch**

#### **(1:04:30) Darren Debloois - Annual Report from the DWR**

Focusing on wildlife management, particularly mountain lions, bears, and coyotes, and their impact on mule deer populations in Utah.

**Mountain Lion Management:** The DWR's population estimates show a steady statewide decline in cougar populations since management strategies were changed, reaching a peak harvest in 2022 and then dropping and stabilizing at a level higher than the long-term average. This suggests previous over-cautious management led to an increase in lion numbers. Confirmed losses of livestock (primarily sheep) to lions have significantly decreased. The DWR is actively working with hunters to target lions in specific "problem" units (e.g., Cache, Morgan-South Rich, Zion) to help mule deer populations recover.

**Bear Management:** Bear populations peaked around 2015 and have since seen a slight downward trend, possibly due to increased hunting opportunities and drought years. Overall harvest has been steadily increasing since 2009. Incidents and confirmed losses of livestock to bears have been trending down in recent years, despite some years with high losses due to single large incidents. The DWR emphasizes a strategy of promptly addressing problem bears.

**Coyote Management:** As of April 1st, a higher bounty of \$100 is offered for coyotes taken within designated mule deer habitat, doubling the previous \$50 bounty for coyotes taken elsewhere in the state. Coyote submissions for payment peaked in 2017 and have been relatively stable since then. The DWR is monitoring the impact of the increased bounty.

The DWR is actively working with producers and hunters to manage predator populations and mitigate their impact on big game and livestock, utilizing robust data collection to inform their strategies.

#### **(1:38) Sierra Nelson - PDCF Program**

The process of issuing contracts to counties for predator control has been updated and streamlined since the program's split from Wildlife Services. Efforts are underway to standardize the contract period to align with the fiscal year (July 1st to June 30th), instead of sending them out in December. This change aims to secure funds before "flying season." Payments now go directly to the Department of Agriculture, then to the wool growers. A new spreadsheet system, developed by Matt, Annie, and Cole, provides real-time data on flying operations, work logs, and deposited checks, significantly improving transparency and reducing inquiries. With two years of data since the program's restructure, the PDCF is reviewing and adjusting the allocation of flying money to counties. This aims to address historical imbalances where some counties had surplus funds while others consistently needed more. Factors like deer unit overlap, county boundaries, and producer locations will be considered. Sierra highly commends the strong partnership with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the matching funds provided by Utah, which significantly extends the program's reach and effectiveness in predator control. The program is currently operating with more planes in the air than ever before, especially with the use of thermal imaging. Overall, the PDCF program is undergoing continuous refinement to improve efficiency, transparency, and impact on predator control efforts across Utah.

#### **(1:48) Annie Thackeray - Predator Control Assessment**

The dates for sending out the assessment letters will be changed to align with the fiscal year, with letters sent out in September and payments due by the end of the year. This aims to standardize the process and improve budget management. UDAF will no longer send different assessment letters for in-state and out-of-state producers. Instead, a single assessment letter will be sent to everyone. This change is based on the reasoning that coyotes affect all producers regardless of residency, and there is no legal basis in existing rules or statutes to differentiate between in-state and out-of-state rates.

#### **(1:51) Cole Selman - Aerial Hunting Permits**

The UDAF is clarifying and updating rules for private aerial hunting permits. Historically, there have been two distinct documents: an aerial hunting permit (tied to the landowner) and a pilot license (tied to the pilot and their aircraft). The proposed changes aim to clearly differentiate these two. Licensees will be required to schedule aerial hunting activities with the local UDAF trapper at least two days before a scheduled flight. This is primarily for safety and resource coordination, ensuring no conflicts with state-run flights. Permit or license holders must submit any changes (e.g., additional aircraft, different pilots, new shooters, property changes) 10 days before engaging in new aerial hunting activities. The current \$10 hunting permit fee is being proposed to increase to \$25 for the aerial hunting permit and \$25 for the pilot license.

Additionally there will be a \$10 fee charged for every request to change an existing permit or license after it's been issued. These proposed fees will need to go through a legislative approval process and would not take effect until July 1, 2026, at the earliest. We are in the process of moving to processing applications through an online system, aiming to make the process easier for users. All proposed changes to Rule 58-25, including the new fees, were voted on by the board and were unanimously approved.

### **(2:03) Cole Selman - Policies and Standards Review**

UDAF is introducing new policies for its trappers to ensure safety, accountability, and efficiency. These policies include a Firearm Policy, a Trapping Policy and a Hide Policy.

- **Firearm policy:** This policy outlines safety guidelines for trappers regarding the storage and use of firearms on the job, including training requirements. The goal is to avoid conflicts and mishaps. All state-issued trappers are equipped with suppressors.
- **Trapping Policy:** This policy ensures that all traps and snares are properly labeled and set in a manner that avoids conflict with the public. It also requires proper posting of signs on trailways and roads to inform the public of active trapping areas.
- **Hide Policy:** This policy encourages trappers to salvage hides from bears, lions, coyotes, and foxes. To incentivize this, the proceeds from the sale of these hides at auction will go back to the trapper's district to fund equipment needs. A new "trap tag" system will be implemented to track salvaged hides, particularly for bears and mountain lions, ensuring they correspond with work logs. The intention is to make the effort of salvaging hides financially worthwhile for the trappers and their districts.

All three policies were voted on by the board and were unanimously approved.

### **(2:15) Motion to Adjourn**