

Feds fail to protect U.S. sheep industry

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Decades of federally subsidized predator control has failed to prevent a sheep industry decline, the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society says.

WCS officials say more than 80 years of federally subsidized predator control with a total investment of more than \$1.6 billion hasn't prevented an 85 percent decline in the sheep industry since its peak of 56.2 million animals in 1942.

The society says predation by coyotes is often cited as the primary cause of the decline. However, the organization says 80 years of historical data reveal a variety of market trends -- ranging from fluctuating hay prices and rising wages for livestock workers, to the drop in wholesale prices of lamb and wool -- are the real culprits behind the industry's decline.

"That the decline of the sheep industry is closely associated with unfavorable market conditions rather than predation losses raises serious doubts about the value of continued efforts to control carnivores," said WCS research scientist Kim Berger, lead author of the study.

The research appears in the latest issue of the journal *Conservation Biology*.

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