

Jett Johnson, former president, said money was a problem when he was president from the mid-80's to the mid-90's.

"I came back to Goldthwaite in '86 and I bought a feed and fur lodger business," Johnson said. "Of course I dealt with all the ranchers and knew all the issues and all the problems - that's been a long time ago, but as always, we were having trouble getting enough money in to maintain the trapper fund." Johnson was passionate about the purpose and the need of the association.

"The main deal of what we see when we can't maintain these predators is it really, really, hurts our deer population," Johnson said. "All the wildlife population - the deer, the turkey, the quail. Maintaining a good, strong, trapper fund is vital for all of Mills County and for our wildlife."

Sutherland agrees the association is not only crucial to livestock production, but the welfare of wildlife as well.

"The damage a lot of people don't see is the damage predators have on wildlife," Sutherland said. "The main cause of fawn mortality, or death of fawns, is predation from animals whether it be a coyote or bobcat or red fox. It's not just counting

livestock damage, but damage to wildlife as well."

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Predator damage isn't limited to livestock and wildlife, but extends into local economies.

"The main industry we have in Mills County is agriculture related," Sutherland said. "Farming and ranching along with the use of recreational wildlife in terms of hunting and fishing. Why we have to keep this program going is that it's not only just our heritage and our way of life, but it's also a way of bringing in tax dollars and dollars that can be used to help other organizations in the community."

By keeping the predator population under control, local economies flourish. Farmers, ranchers, and those involved with wildlife recreation can make a profit on their animals and in turn are able to give back to the community.

"When it comes time to help out our volunteer fire departments within the county, we are able to donate individually to their fundraisers," Sutherland said. "It allows us as producers to help with the Youth Fair Association, donate to the Buyers Club, or buy premiums to be able to

help the youth in Mills County that way. It allows us to be able to donate to something like the WWII memorial project and being able to give back to the community and other organizations that need financial help because having these predators under control allows us to be profitable in our line of work as farmers and ranchers." If the predator population were to ever get out of control, the economy suffers.

"We have two trappers in this county," Sutherland said. "If we were to lose one, the one remaining would be overwhelmed to the point where he could not be effective. We have to keep that balance between predators and feral hogs. If we let that get out of control, there will be people that won't be able to raise sheep and goats and people that will have trouble farming due to the increase in feral hogs and other predators - that takes tax dollars and money out of our local economy. Eventually, we would be one of those one buck counties that have very low deer population and they do not have that big increase of money coming into the county which is what we have every year due to deer season and wildlife recreation."

Mildred Peters, owner of the Service

Feed Mill in Priddy and member since the association was founded, is a prime example of someone who has benefited from the association.

"It's helped me by catching coyotes and putting out snares and traps to catch them so I don't have 13 of my lambs dead," Peters said. "I'm able to pay into the association donate feed and through the Service Feed Mill in Priddy to be sold so that they can get more money together to pay our two trappers. I don't know how we could ever do without them."

Mills County is not just known for prime hunting and livestock land, but also for the friendly inhabitants and supportive community.

"We have such a great and supportive community," Sutherland said. "It's amazing how they come together and work hard to get a job done and help preserve our way of life and our heritage here in Mills County."

As the weather cools and hunting season begins, remember the Predator Association and the way they contribute to make hunting season enjoyable and plentiful.

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