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LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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Susan Irby (202) 224-8078
Will Hart (208) 342-7985

When Ranchers Cry “Wolf!”
by: Senator Larry Craig

“They are killing animals a hundred feet from my door!”
– from a letter to me by a concerned Idahoan

Those of us who have owned livestock knew this is what would happen. What we feared has become a reality. Wolves are roaming Idaho, and their presence is hurting the livelihoods of many Idahoans.

In 1996, I warned the former Secretary of the Interior under the Clinton Administration, Bruce Babbitt, that introducing gray wolves into Yellowstone and Central Idaho would carry a price tag for local ranchers. I asked him to wait until we knew exactly how that cost would be borne before taking any action. He ignored my warning, releasing wolves into the Rocky Mountain ecosystem and leaving all compensation for depredation caused by wolves to come from private sources.

Twelve years later, ranchers face an additional problem. The private money that was promised to cover damages caused by wolves will not be available next year, and now ranchers are looking for help. Idaho has been fortunate enough to secure \$100,000 a year for this cause, through my work on the Senate Appropriations Committee, but our neighbors to the east have not been so fortunate: Ranchers in Montana and Wyoming are struggling to make up for the livestock and other wildlife they’re losing to wolf attacks. Very soon, Idahoans will join their ranks.

That is why I recently co-sponsored the Gray Wolf Livestock Loss Mitigation Act of 2008 along with my colleagues from Montana and Wyoming. This bill would provide grants through the Department of Interior to our three States and Tribes within our borders to support landowners both in preventing livestock predation and obtaining compensation for any losses. The federal government has forced wolves upon the people of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. It seems reasonable that the federal government should help pay for the harm this is causing.

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This is particularly important because that harm is likely to increase. In 2005, an estimated 50,000 coyotes caused 600 losses in Idaho and an estimated 500 wolves were responsible for almost 900. That’s nearly two losses per wolf, compared to a little more than one loss per one hundred coyotes. Last year the wolf population was estimated to have increased to almost 750, and their numbers are still increasing today. It is safe to assume that with the increase in wolf population, there comes an increase of depredation.

Up until now, wolves have known no predator. They have roamed freely, killing as they wish. Giving ranchers permission to kill a wolf that is attacking their livestock is a step in the right direction, but it’s not enough. They also ought to have a realistic opportunity to be compensated when, despite that limited ability to control the situation, their flocks and herds are damaged by wolf attacks.

Growing up on a ranch, I understand the frustration and nervousness my fellow ranchers are feeling. They were minding their own business, peacefully raising cattle and sheep, when a monstrous threat was thrown on their doorstep. That threat was not of their making. The federal government released wolves into their lives, and it’s time the federal government pitched in to help pay for the depredation caused by this policy.