OREGON'S INVESTMENT IN SHEEP HEAVY

More Than 2,200,000 Animals in State, Valued at $22,000,000—Land and Equipment Ties Up Much Capital

Driving Sheep to Summer Range in Eastern Oregon.

By S. W. McClure, Former Secretary National Woolgrowers' Association.

THOSE Oregonians who are not familiar with the early development of Oregon, and those who spend their time in the cities, are apt to overlook the fact that Oregon has a vast and important sheep industry that in ordinary times brings to the state a large and necessary income without in any way encroaching on other industries. Oregon has now about 2,200,000 sheep that a year ago were worth around $35,000,000. By reason of the crash that has overtaken the wool industry this sheep value has shrunk to about $22,000,000.

Generally it is thought that sheep men have a relatively small investment for the number of sheep they own. This thought arises from the fact that our sheep spend at least a portion of each year on the national forests or on the public domain. In spite of this fact, however, the sheep industry of Oregon and other western states represents a very heavy investment in things other than sheep. While the public domain is used a part of the year, all sheepmen now own ranches and large areas of grazing lands. In addition to land, the modern flockman has camps, houses, barns, sheds and almost everything else needed to place his business on a stable basis.

The days of the nomadic flock-owner are over—his place has been taken by one of the most substantial citizens the country has. His large investment in properties that can only be used for sheep makes his a permanent fixture among the industries of the state.

Land Investment Large.

Every time the sheepman invests one dollar in sheep he has to put one dollar and a half in land and equipment with which to handle them. This basis of cost obtains throughout all western states except New Mexico, Arizona and Utah where land holdings are small. This investment in things other than sheep is what gives such extreme stability to the business. Financial panics, floods, blizzards and drouths may come and go, but the sheep man must go on fighting it out along the old lines, for his plant is only useful for sheep, and no industry has passed through the ups and downs that the sheep industry has, but always in the end it has won out.

Once I talked with a prominent western banker, who told me that in 21 years his bank had loaned $16,500,000 on sheep, but of this total loan he has lost only $2750. He told me that twice during the 21 years it looked as if his bank would be wiped out due to sheep losses. But each time recovery was made. This banker's experience is not exceptional. It would probably be confirmed by nearly every banker in the "sheep country."

Western sheep men have not made money since our entry into the war. Nineteen hundred seventeen was their last good year. In 1918 most of them about broke even. In 1919 they lost money and 1920 has been their worst year since 1893.

Of course the public only knows about the advance in the price of wool and mutton during the war, but does not know about the advance in the cost of producing these articles, which has far more than swallowed up the increased income.

Let us see what happened to the sheepmen during the war. In 1910 it cost 59 cents per head for labor for each sheep owned. In 1918 labor costs $2.15 per sheep. In 1910 the cost of grass, feed and hay for each sheep averaged 96 cents; in 1918 this had grown to $4.58. The cost of shearing sheep in 1910 was 11 cents; in 1918 31 cents. The amount charged to miscellaneous expense per sheep in 1910 was 14 cents, and per sheep in 1918 it was 32 cents. The fee to the national forests in 1910 was 6 cents, and in 1918 it was 12 cents.

Thus it will be seen that all along the line, the expense of handling sheep increased from 100 per cent to over 400 per cent. But the income increased proportionately much less than the expenses. The industry however, could have sustained this embarrassment had it not been for the severe winter of 1919 and 1920. That season turned out to be about three winters turned into one and while few grown sheep were lost, the lamb crop was only 50 per cent of normal. On top of this came the deluge of foreign wool, with a decline in wool prices to about 50 per cent of 1918 values. This has made the lot of the sheepman most difficult, but, fortunately he still has his sheep and a place to run them and, if given half a show, will pull through and pay every dollar he owes.

Foreign Wool Floods Market.

When the war came, our government was quick to realize the necessity of a large supply of wool. Therefore, the government appealed to the wool growers to turn over their entire 1918 clip at a price fixed by the government. The wool growers in a spirit or patriotism agreed to the sale and received for their wool a price actually below the cost of production. The 1918 clip was taken over on April 20, 1918, at a price which proved to be from 5 to 20 per cent below its actual value in our markets at that date, but the war was on, the boys needed clothing, and the grower sacrificed the chance to make a profit in order to "do his bit."

Then the War Industries board started to buy wool in foreign lands and brought about large importations. Finally when the war ended our government held a huge stock of wool which it has been selling at reasonably low prices, which have demoralized the market so that growers still hold 85 per cent of their 1920 wool, for which there is no market.

Much of the present misfortune of the sheepmen is due to the failure of the Wilson administration to measure up to its job and put in effect definite and progressive measures for reconstruction. The recent election, however, assures the country that something in this direction will be accomplished in the immediate future. Wool growers are seeking an embargo against the importation of foreign wool until such time as a tariff law can be enacted. Such a measure would instantly restore confidence in the business. The exigencies of the situation make it probable that early action along these lines will be taken.

Naturally when one talks about a tariff on wool the old talk of high priced clothing is revived, however, the consumer need have no fears in this direction. The price of the wool entering into a suit of clothes is so insignificant that it has no influence on the value of the finished product. As I write this I am wearing an all-wool suit of winter clothing. The wool for this suit was grown in Oregon and the cloth was woven in a Portland mill. At today's wool prices all the wool in this suit would bring the wool grower about 90 cents—yet the suit cost $50. A few cents more or less on the price of the wool never has and never will affect retail clothing prices.

The sheep industry is of profund importance to all western states and particularly to the state of Oregon. Since 1821, when the first sheep were landed at Astoria, Or., the industry has been making history and contributing to the development of the west. It will continue to develop and Oregon is destined to derive more benefit from it than any other western state. Portland is a noted wool center and will sooner or later become a large wool manufacturing center. Already western Oregon has many woolen mills and her ideal climate for wool manufacturing must in the near future add to the number.

The time is already ripe for the location of a big carpet mill at Portland to use up the large supply of coarse wools grow in western Oregon. Portland now needs a large suit manufacturing establishment and the development of a wool market in Portland will tend to bring it about.

While the sheep industry is now passing through a period of financial distress, the industry is fundamentally sound. There has been marked improvement in the general conditions surrounding the sheep, the range is in better condition than for many years, hay and grain are abundant and much lower in price, labor is more efficient and working at less cost. Everywhere extravagance and unnecessaries have been eliminated, and with any reasonable luck the sheep industry will emerge triumphant and meet every obligation.

MILK-GOAT DAIRYING IS NEW OREGON INDUSTRY.

With over 3000 milk goats in the state at the present time, goat dairying is taking form in this section. A corporation has been organized to market the product of milk goats, with offices in Portland. More importations of pure-bred animals are planned by farmers at Pendleton, La Grande, Albany, Salem, Eugene, Astoria and in southern Oregon. The only goat dairy in the northwest has been established and now has 120 milk goats. Later the herd will be brought up to 1000 animals and the company will enter the cheese-making field.

BRITISH TRAINS RUN OVER OREGON TIES.

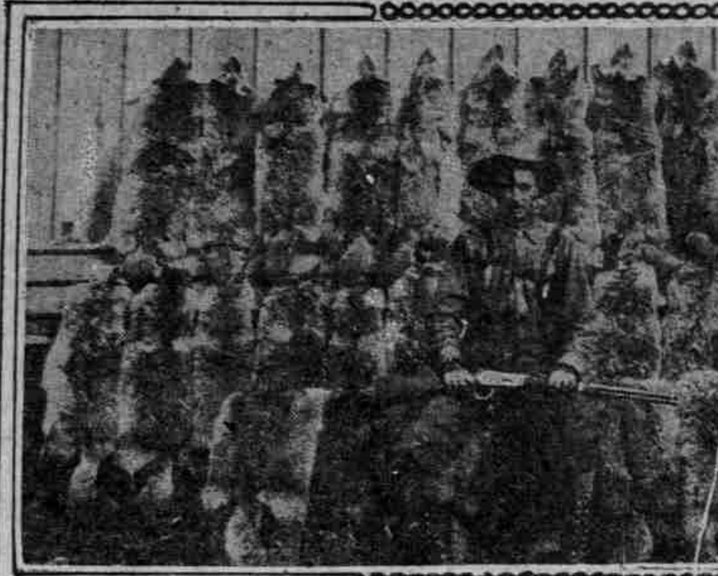
Trains in the United Kingdom are to travel over wood from Oregon forests, for 40 per cent of the vast tie shipments of 1920 from the Douglas Fir Exploitation & Export company were loaded along the Columbia river. The concern shipped 21,000,000 feet from north Pacific ports.

OREGON FORESTS GROW DIVERSIFIED WOODS.

An example of the extraordinary number of diversified woods grown in forests of Oregon is found in the report of a forest examiner in this territory. In the Cascade national forest, within a distance of 12 miles, he found 14 species of coniferous trees. They included western yellow pine, western white pine, sugar pine, lodgepole pine, knob cone pine, Douglas fir, western hemlock, incense cedar, western red cedar, Engelmann spruce, white fir, red fir, mountain hemlock and western yew.

WAR IS WAGED ON PREDATORY ANIMALS

Thousands Saved Oregon Stockmen Through the Killing of Wolves and Coyotes



Government Hunter With One Month's Catch.

By Stanley G. Jewett, Predatory Animal Inspector, Bureau of Biological Survey, Portland.

SINCE time immemorial the larger predatory wild animals of the world have caused man much concern. With hunting implements of stone, the ancients protected their homes against the saber-toothed tiger and the cave bear.

Before the advent of the white man in this country the Indian waged war against the mountain lion and the grizzly bear with spear, bow and arrow. When the farmer and the stock grower turned their herds loose in the fertile valleys of the new world these same wild animals took a heavy toll to satisfy their savage hunger. The history of the early efforts of the stockman is replete with tales of sheep, cattle and horses killed by the hundreds by such animals as wolves, coyotes and mountain lions. This soon led to war being declared against the marauders. Early in the game, states offered bounties on the most destructive species, large owners employed professional hunters and engaged men to place poison on the ranges, but still losses in the flock continued.

Early in 1915 the first real organized efforts by the Bureau of Biological survey of the United States Department of Agriculture were made to control the depredations of these pests. This was brought about through the urgent appeal of stock growers who had become discouraged with the slow and ineffectual bounty system. About this time the coyotes of the northwestern states were seriously affected with rabies. During the years 1915-1916 not less than $500,000 worth of stock was lost in the state of Nevada through being bitten by rabid animals, principally coyotes.

The loss in Oregon was nearly as great, some ranchers in the eastern part of the state losing from 200 to 300 head of cattle.

The force of trappers now operating under the direction of the Biological Survey are under the immediate supervision of an experienced inspector in each district, the districts being divided by state lines as far as practicable. The personnel of the force are chosen with care, one of the requirements being that the trapper has had experience on the open range or the rough mountain country where he is to be employed. These men are paid a straight monthly salary and are required to produce the skin or scalp of every animal reported killed. During the winter months all skins of any fur value are collected and sold at the government fur sales and the money derived therefrom is deposited in the United States Treasury.

During the past year from 300 to 400 experienced hunters have been employed throughout the stock-raising states of the west. During the last fiscal year this force of men has killed 523 wolves, 21,558 coyotes, 189 mountain lions, 2987 bobcats, 10 Canada lynxes and 94 bears. The bears killed by government hunters were known to be stock-killers. In addition to the above, as a result of extensive poisoning operations it has been estimated that approximately 25,000 additional animals were killed of which no skins or scalps were taken. Stockmen throughout the country where these poison campaigns have been conducted are continually reporting the finding of dead coyotes on their ranges.

Special efforts to destroy individual predatory stock-killing animals that have become notorious are always put forth by the inspectors in charge. For instance, a short time ago a lone coyote was known to have killed $375 worth of sheep near Ashland, Or. A government hunter was dispatched to the scene and killed the guilty coyote.

Coyote Is Most Destructive.

The predatory animals against whom the government hunters are working in Oregon are the coyote, bobcat, wolf and mountain lion. Of these the coyote is the most abundant and destructive. Since the work of eradication was started in this state during the summer of 1915 a total of 8511 of the "government dogs" have been killed and accounted for either by skin or scalp. In addition a great number have been poisoned of which we have no accurate check. It has been estimated that it costs the stockmen of the west an average of $50 apiece to provide food for the coyotes on his range. The 8511 coyotes accounted for means a saving of $425,550 to the stock-growers of Oregon. Stockmen of several eastern Oregon counties report that after government trappers have worked on their ranges practically all losses from coyotes have been eliminated.

Next to the coyotes in point of abundance and destructiveness comes the bobcat. He is a merciless killer, often visiting the sheep corral and slaying a score or more of his helpless victims during a night. Fortunately bobcats are easily trapped and hunted with dogs. A total of 1974 of these animals have been accounted for by federal hunters in this state since 1915.

Wolves and cougars are only moderately plentiful in Oregon, the range of the former being almost entirely confined to the Cascade mountains, only rarely being found elsewhere. Cougar are more plentiful in the Cascades and westward to the coast, but few are found throughout the Blue mountain region of eastern Oregon. Both these animals are very destructive to livestock and game. The wolf is a wily animal and has to be controlled with traps and poison, while the cougar or mountain lion can be trapped or treed by dogs and shot. Forty-one mountain lions and 14 timber wolves have been killed by the few men detailed to this kind of work.