



Engaging Political Will

By Teresa Platt, Executive Director, Fur Commission USA

In the summer of 1998, Louis Freeh, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), traveled to Europe where he addressed a group of people involved in animal and resource-based industries. Freeh was asked about eco- and animal rights terrorism in the United States and his response was relayed back to US fur farmers by friends in the audience. Eco- and animal rights terrorism, said Freeh, was not an issue, not a priority and not on the agency's "radar screen".

Of course, for fur farmers suffering the impacts of illegal actions against their livelihoods and their animals, along with others in animal and resource-based industries, these remarks were discouraging. How could the director of the FBI not see the obvious pattern of attacks against those who feed, clothe and shelter the Earth's inhabitants? How could he not see, in every industrialized country in the world, this manifestation of something going very wrong?

But what a difference a few months can make!

"Violent Aberrants"

On February 4, Freeh addressed the Senate Appropriations Committee for the Departments of Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary Subcommittee. His 17-page statement included the following:

"Domestic terrorist groups represent interests that span the full political spectrum, as well as social issues and concerns. ... The current domestic terrorist threat primarily comes from right-wing extremist groups, Puerto Rican extremist groups and special interest extremists ... Special interest or single issue extremists advocate violence and/or criminal activity with the goal of effecting change in policy vis à

vis one specific aspect of society. The most recognizable single issue terrorists at the present time are those involved in the violent animal rights, anti-abortion, and environmental protection movements. Each of these issues evoke strong emotions within society at large, and violent aberrants continue to tarnish the legitimate public debate on each issue. ... Animal rights extremists continue to pose significant challenges for law enforcement as well.

Various arsons and other incidents of property destruction have been claimed by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). For example, on October 19, 1998, the Vail Ski Resort suffered a series of arson attacks that damaged or destroyed eight separate structures and resulted in approximately \$12 million in property damage. In a communiqué issued to various news agencies in Colorado, ELF claimed responsibility for the arsons in retaliation for the resort's plans to expand its ski areas. The group claimed that the proposed expansion would destroy the last remaining habitat in Colorado for the lynx."

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Fires in Vail, Mink in Michigan

As every fur farmer knows, with the public still reel-

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FBI Director Louis Freeh to the Senate Appropriations Committee, Feb. 4, 1999



ing from the animal rights/eco-arson fire in Vail, Colorado, animal rights extremists struck the Pipkorn Mink Ranch in Powers, Michigan, releasing over 5,000 mink. The terrorists' trail led directly from fires in Vail to mink in Michigan. Law enforcement officers around the country dusted off those old mink files.

Domestic terrorism has hit small family farms, food producers, research scientists, loggers, miners and the recreation industry. With so many victims complaining about these acts of terrorism and the risks now facing the millions of Americans who recreate in the great outdoors, government must prosecute these criminals and the public must make an effort to understand why industrialized society is experiencing this negative symptom.

Political will is what it takes. The National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), a non-profit educational animal welfare organization of people involved in animal-based enterprises, has issued a "Call for Action" against animal rights and eco-terrorism. The Call for Action requests that the United States Senate Judiciary Committee:

Direct the Department of Justice to establish a National joint task force, which includes the F.B.I., B.A.T.F. and I.R.S. to investigate, apprehend and prosecute individuals and organizations involved in illegal activities of eco/animal rights terrorism.

A complete copy of the Call For Action can be accessed from the home page of FCUSA's website (www.furcommission.com), or will be provided on request by telephoning NAIA on (503) 761-8962. Says NAIA's executive director Patti Strand, a dog breeder and author of *The Hijacking of the Humane Movement*, "NAIA is urging its member groups to push our government to commit the resources required to protect our U.S. citizens who are in fear for their lives and property. The threats made over

the Internet have escalated, the attacks are getting more and more fierce. We must have action by law enforcement and our politicians. We refuse to allow America to be turned into a playground for political terrorists who are using violence and threats to force political change."

Changing Priorities

In talking to FBI agents, the redirection of FBI manpower to include eco- and animal rights terrorism entailed a bottom-up educational process. Fur America's *Fur Netwatch*, an Internet info distribution system, has been a vital component in that process. Over the last year, the people of the fur trade have been key players with other animal- and resource-based industries in a concerted effort to push eco- and animal rights terrorism up the government's priority pole. These efforts have resulted in a strong statement of commitment from the FBI.

But we should not stop here. After years of incidents of violence against those who make their living in concert with the Earth, we need a national discussion of why violence against resource caretakers is happening. What causes consumers in industrial societies to attack the producers who feed, clothe and shelter them? Isn't this suicidal and nihilistic? Can we stop this symptom and address the cause? Is this a symptom of the urban/rural split, the industrialization of society, the huge demographic shift that has happened to us over the last 100 years as generations of us have left the farm?

Peaceful protest and civil discourse is welcome. But we must find out how we, as a society, can stop being an enabler to those engaging in violence built on layers of hate.

To encourage FBI Director Louis Freeh in the fight against animal rights terrorism, write to: FBI Headquarters, Correspondence Unit Room 6236, 935 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D 20535.