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Mink ranchers battle animal activists

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A report compiled by an animal-rights group, a how-to guide for carrying out attacks against mink ranchers, targets several fur farms on the East Side of Summit County. Author Peter Young claims the 62-page document represents "the largest collection of fur industry intelligence to date."

The title of the booklet: "The Blueprint Fur Farm Intelligence Project: The Full Report." "In 1997, I left home with a list of fur farm addresses and drove across the country collecting notes on the U.S. fur industry. Those notes were confiscated by the FBI, I was sent to prison, and the notes were never made public," Young states in the opening lines of his report. "In 2009, I organized a resurrection: a two-month road trip to every fur farm in the western U.S. The goal: compile the largest collection of raw industry data to date."

There are about 90 fur farms in Utah, according to Young. His report lists addresses, telephone numbers and descriptions for about 15 working mink ranches from Henefer to Oakley. Animal activists have used tactics considered violent by some people to release captive mink, which are bred for their fur for use in clothing items.

"'The Blueprint' is a little disturbing. Basically, what 'The Blueprint' is, is a terrorist handbook," a mink rancher in Coalville told The Park Record on Wednesday. The man, who is in his 20s, spoke to the newspaper at his ranch on the condition of anonymity.

"All this is is domestic terrorism, and I have a target on my back," he said in the interview.

"They're out there calling death threats in to ranchers. We spend many sleepless nights on the ranch."

Most times he is armed, the rancher added.

"Of course we're going to be vigilant. We've got a lot of money invested," he said. Security at his ranch has increased with the recent waves of attacks on fur farmers by activists.

"I can't tell you much about our security. But it has definitely improved," the rancher said.

"No matter what they do to me, this is my livelihood."

Posters of celebrities like Cindy Crawford and Elizabeth Hurley, draped in black fur, hang on the walls of the processing room where ranchers prepare pelts after skinning the mink.

"Mink aren't skinned alive. If they were, I'd be against it," insisted the rancher. "The animal-rights groups make us out to be unsympathetic monsters. I just hope the people understand that we're not monsters. We're just trying to make a living."

A group of radical activists took credit in 2008 for releasing thousands of mink from a ranch in Kaysville. Many of those animals did not survive.

"What's it going to take for 10,000 mink to survive in the wild? It just doesn't make sense," the Coalville rancher said. "These people really don't care about the animals. All it does is kill mink."

Coalville resident Ella Adkins, 91, said she has spent most of her life on a mink ranch. "It's been very successful," Adkins said.

Extremists began targeting fur farmers after World War II, she explained in an interview at her home.

"These environmentalists, they have been around for a while," she said. "The good book tells you that everything on the Earth is for the benefit of man. They don't believe in scriptures, I guess."

Adkins described an attack several years ago at a mink farm in Coalville.

"They just turned the mink loose," she said. "A lot of them got run over, and they didn't find a lot of them."

"No trespassing" signs at both ends of her property warn activists to keep their distance, Adkins said.

"They are against raising cattle. They're against raising pigs. They're against raising chickens," she said. "Why are these things on the Earth if they aren't for the benefit of man?"

However, Jerry Vlasak, a spokesman for the North American Animal Liberation Press Office, said the short lives of captive mink are riddled with stress and excruciating pain.

With its many mink farms Utah has been a target for activists, Vlasak said.

Summit, Cache, Morgan and Salt Lake are among the counties producing the most mink pelts and Summit County Sheriff's Office deputies believe animal activists are behind a rash of threats against local fur farms in the past year.

Caption:

A rancher holds a mink Wednesday in the North Summit area. Photo by Grayson West (c) 2010 Park Record. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Media

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