Some stockmen in desperation have resorted to a dangerous weapon—satirical humor—in their battle with environmental activists over the predator control issue. Possibly the ultimate deployment of that weapon has been the creation of the “Rat to Life” Society, organized by Spade Ranch general manager W.J. “Dub” Waldrip (Lubbock,) and carried toward its illogical conclusion by the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association.

Waldrip hit upon the idea after reading a New York Times article about a rat eradication drive prompted when a woman was bitten near the Big Apple's city hall. He promptly fired off a letter to the editor of the Times protesting the ecological folly of taking “action against the entire rat population.” He emphasized his position, “This is certainly unfair,” he lamented, “and I am grateful that we are more civilized out here in this part of the country. At one time were just as ignorant.

“We have, at times, population explosions of coyotes, wolves or other predators, but clear-thinking members of such organizations as Defenders of Wildlife, Sierra Club, Wilderness Society and a multitude of others have pointed out how fortunate we should feel to contribute our lambs and calves to the care and feeding of these poor animals. The fact that we now support more of these animals than ever before in our country's history attests to the success of our program.”

Waldrip expressed confidence that the Rat to Life Society would receive considerable support from the afore-named groups, “since the great majority of these associations come from large population centers such as those along the Eastern Seaboard.”

Calling for help in “this fight to save our rats,” he contended that “rats have as much entitlement to life as coyotes and other creatures. To identify and punish the guilty rodent is one thing—but to poison indiscriminately will upset the delicate ecological balance. DON'T TAMPER WITH OUR ECOSYSTEM”

Waldrip's final plea was a genuine heartstring-tugger. He reminded Times readers that “you have plenty of folks up there. Don't you think it worth giving up a few of them for the joy of looking out at night and seeing a big trophy-sized boar rat silhouetted in the moonlight as he scampers up a pile of garbage?”

Waldrip's letter, reprinted in TS&GRA's Ranch Magazine, prompted a membership application from Jerry V. Allen, vice-president and trust officer of the Frost National Bank of San Antonio. Allen noted that he administers more than a half-million acres of land and, accordingly, shares the RLS concern over the “indiscriminate brutal destruction” of “defenseless” urban rats.

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The Society, he continued, is considering seeking a court injunction to halt "all their murderous schemes" until a full hearing can be conducted. Failing that, Waldrip suggested New York has received so much federal aid that it should be declared "a portion of the public lands" and placed under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management. He would then favor establishing an “adopt-a-rat” program.

In appreciation of Waldrip's efforts, TS&GRA commissioned San Angelo artist Jimmy Cox to produce a cartoon showing a properly concerned rancher protectively embracing a properly scruffy rat. The cartoon has since been imprinted on T-shirts, and another drawing of a moonlit rat silhouetted atop a garbage can has been used to decorate caps.

The next installment in the unfolding drama was perhaps inevitable. TS&GRA executive secretary Bill Sims, hearing that the General Services Administration and the Parks Service had been called in to combat a rat problem in the White House, mailed RLS T-shirts to the First Family. He enclosed a letter to President Carter outlining the Society's roots and purpose, slyly sneaking in a plea for improved predator control efforts. Sims pointed out that Compound 1080, commonly used as rodenticide in crowded urban areas, has been banned for predator control use on the open range because of claims that such use is too hazardous.

In his closing remarks, Sims suggested to Carter that, if the White House rat problem doesn't clear up, "you might use your paddle to fend them off. After all, the ranchers of this nation have been up the creek without a paddle so far as predators are concerned for years!"

The next step? Well, Sims has forwarded copies of all correspondence to both the Merv Griffin Show and Johnny Carson's Tonight Show. Responses so far have not been exactly positive, but then they haven't been absolutely negative either. How could they be, with an issue so central to the public's concern over environmental protection?