

It's been almost 4 weeks since the mink release in Utah at Chuck Lodder's Ranch. Both Wess and I still wake up still in the middle of the night and worry. I thought I would share a little of that day for you.

When Bryan Boyce called us at 5:30 Sunday morning, there was no hesitation to get up and go. We checked our own ranches before leaving. We had a few minutes to sip a cup of coffee knowing it would be our only "nourishment" for most of the day.

Before we got to the Lodder's ranch, we encountered Stan and Kendra Reese & boys rounding up mink at the sewer plant about 1/4 of a mile from the ranch. Between the bed of their truck and Bryan's we probably had a good 50 to 75 mink. It was hard to count and hard to keep them in the truck.

When we got to the ranch I stood at the top of their big shed. If you can imagine an ocean of black mink, EVERYWHERE. It was a sight I'll remember for a long time and one I hope I never see again. Lindsey McMullin and his son, whose mink were released 1 month before in South Jordan were already there, moving down the isle, catching right and left. What a nice man he is and it was a heck of a way to get to know someone. Before you knew it, familiar faces were popping up everywhere. Stan Stuart and his son, Smokey Dillree, his grandson and his wife. The Ball Brothers, Tony Jones, Keith Johnson & sons, Paul Westwood and his son, the Willis', the Becksteads, Rusty Woolsey, and of course all the Lodder's and their employees. Dennis Reese and his son Chase, Chad and Chaz Rowser, Reed and Dane Dixon, Chris Falco from the Fur Breeders came and handed out water, and many, many more who I wish I knew their names. And of course Ryan Holt. Ryan not only catching but taking care of the press, the FBI and keeping the communications going to the right people.

The destruction to the ranch was well planned. Holes cut in the security fence every 5-6 feet which enabled the mink to run into the adjoining field. Not only were the pen lids opened but they had removed the boxes also. Although the ALF communique said they destroyed pedigree cards, we didn't see evidence of that. Maybe they lied???? They vandalized at least one truck that I'm aware of. The morning went by fast and we worked together in doing what needed to be done. The weeds on the other side of the fence were immensely tall, as a line of guys walked from one end of the length of the fence to the other, handing mink over to waiting catchers who in turn ran to the sheds and put them in pens. Because the weeds were so thick, the mink would hide under what had been tramped on, so the guys turned around and came back doing the same thing. Watching Dennis Rees doing a tackle,,yes a flying tackle no less, was something to behold. The local church stopped their services and asked people to go to their neighborhood and catch what they could. They were filling up portable dog kennels and bringing them down the road. Thank goodness it wasn't a "hot" Utah day, but warm enough to make us all sweat. We finally got some water, Gatorade, etc. so we could keep on going. I believe by the time we were done, we had 90% of the mink back in pens.

What impressed me the most was the camaraderie that we shared and the immense respect everyone had for not only each other but for the Lodder family as well. We were not catching mink that were sold at Seattle or Toronto, we were catching mink that are the among the best in North America, raised humanly and supported a family. They didn't destroy us but made us stronger. We were watching out for us. You also have to respect the one's who stayed at home, like Lynn Boyce and my father in law Jay, who stayed at home and made sure our farms were safe and our mink taken care of. Lynn and I have canvassed our areas and have set up our own neighborhood watch. The Summit County and Morgan County Sheriff's dept. have stepped up patrols and we have our own local Search and Rescue patrolling for us also.

Wess and I agree, we never want to see this happen again, but if it does, we will be there in a heartbeat. No one is going to take care of us, but us.

Stay Vigilant, Wess and Mary Wardell