Capitol View

By Ed Howard

The clientele at Ole's Big Game Bar seemed destined to witness a sudden, unpleasant end to what had for decades been a close relationship.

Two fellows at the bar, eating up some groceries and throwing down some beers, had come to disagree about the décor. Ole's big game bar in Paxton was decorated with big game trophies. All kinds. All over the place. Still is.

Conversation first centered agreeably on the beauty of the animals and the quality of the taxidermy.

Unexpectedly, one of the guys, I'd known him as a hunter for years, said with obvious and sincere distaste that mounting big-game animals per se was disgusting. And his vitriol ran deep.

A hunter making a spectacle of a big-game kill was everything from mean-spirited to egomaniacal, unsportsmanlike, delusional and undoubtedly unsure of his manhood, he said.

It was the latter assertion, which sparked a Vesuvius eruption from our third party.

If someone will get close enough to a grizzly or a polar bear, or a big cat or cape buffalo to dispatch it with a rifle, he asked, doesn't it say something about them? About their courage?

The rejoinder: Not one bit.

He argued big-game hunting merely represented man's ability to use technology to overcome animals that otherwise might look at Homo sapiens and think hor d'oeuvres. And it gives hunters who can afford it an exotic, expensive entertainment experience. It's an ego thing.

Could there come a time when it would be seen as appropriate to mount a big-game trophy?

"When the animals can shoot back!"

That episode from the early 1980s comes to mind whenever the subject of big game hunting comes around – perhaps a dozen or so times.

The Legislature is looking at a proposal from the Game and Parks Commission that would give the GPC the authority to establish a hunting season on mountain lions, also known as cougars.

The state figures there are 20 or so cougars around Nebraska, mostly in the northwest, capable of breeding.

Proponents say they want the law on the books just in case it's needed some day. There haven't been any reports of the cats taking down livestock. Besides, it's already legal to shoot a cougar if it threatens animals or people.

The potential Nebraska scenario:

Imagine what some hunters would pay for a permit to kill a mountain lion, and either have it

mounted or have made into a “rug” type of trophy.

Permits could be offered through an auction – creating the potential for indefinite amounts of revenue by issuing just a few of them.

Proponents insist the bill is only a “just in case” thing. At the top of those cases will always be “just in case” the Commission comes to a time and place when a it appears that killing off a portion of Nebraska’s cougar population could generate comparatively big revenue with very little effort.

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