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Operational Activities: Protecting Livestock From Predators

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Predators, such as coyotes, wolves, foxes, mountain lions, grizzlies, and eagles, play vital roles in our ecosystems. Their presence among people creates opportunities and challenges. Predators may provide recreational benefits via observation and photography; however, they may also pose challenges for ranching operations.

Integrated solutions to address livestock predation may include modifications of animal husbandry practices and habitat, population management, and novel approaches developed through research.

For detailed information about the biology and ecology of predators, as well as predation management information for various predator species, view the handbook

entitled, “Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage”. The handbook has chapters on coyotes, mountain lions, red fox, bobcat, grizzlies, black bears, eagles, feral dogs, and many other species.

Predators are killing my livestock. What are my options?

We recommend that you consult with the Wildlife Services office in your State. You can also reach a State office by calling toll free **1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297)**.

Learn How WS Works With Livestock Producers

Livestock Losses to Predators

Livestock losses to predators occurs nationwide. Although historically this has been a problem mostly in the West, the occurrence is increasing in the East as populations of some predators expand their range (for example, coyotes).

NASS Surveys

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering U.S. agriculture. APHIS partners with NASS to collect and summarize information about livestock predation. Their latest reports are:

- NASS Report on Sheep and Goats Death Loss
- NASS Report on Cattle Death Loss

Economics of Livestock Losses and Predation Management

The WS predation management program provides a significant benefit to livestock producers and the public. In an analysis of 1998 (NASS) data, Bodenchuk, Mason, and Pitt found that for every dollar spent for predation management, $3 worth of livestock were saved. The full impact of a $20 million investment in predation management ($9 million in Federal funds and $11 million in cooperative funds) was a $250 million net increase in economic activity. Using today's livestock values, the cost-benefit ratio would be much greater. For every Federal dollar spent on

predation management $10.88 in livestock is saved. Counting cooperative dollars, the cost-benefit ratio is $1:$4.87. Livestock protection activities to reduce predation from coyotes have cost-benefit ratios ranging from 1:3 to 1:27.

Wyoming's predator management program relating to livestock is cost effective, according to an analysis by the University of Wyoming's College of Agriculture. For each dollar spent in Wyoming on predation management, the benefit to livestock producers is $1.60 to $2.30.

Consideration of the benefits of predation management should include an examination of direct benefits, spillover benefits, and intangible benefits. Direct benefits accrued to the program recipient are calculated based on the number of individual animals saved from predation. Spillover benefits include secondary, indirect or incidental effects and intangible benefits include things such as overall optimized public values for predators where predation impacts are reduced. Visit the American Sheep Industry Association website to learn more.

Identifying Livestock Losses to Predators

Livestock may be harmed or killed by parasites, weather, predators, or a wide variety of other conditions and situations. Identifying the cause of livestock losses is the first step in finding solutions to the problem.

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Predation Management Options

Livestock producers that use an integrated predator management program, consisting of nonlethal and lethal techniques, are most effective at reducing livestock loss. Husbandry practices and other actions taken by producers can limit the impacts of predation.

WS works in partnership with agencies, organizations, and individuals around the Nation to protect livestock from predation. Much of WS' operational management assistance to producers is supported by funds provided by States, counties, producers, and others, in addition to federally appropriated dollars.

Science-Based Solutions to Predator Livestock Conflicts

The WS National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research and investigational activities on a wide variety of wildlife damage issues. NWRC scientists at the NWRC Scientists at the Logan, Utah Field Station focus much of their efforts on predator ecology and livestock protection management methods. Ecological research, including population and predator-prey modeling and studies about predator interactions with prey and other predators, has also been conducted by NWRC.

NWRC support of predation management includes significant resources devoted to maintaining existing tools as well as the development of new methods. Current programs include investigations of chemical reproductive inhibitors, development and testing of alternative mechanical capture methods, and projects that evaluate nonlethal methods.

Gray Wolf Management

WS partners with State wildlife agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct wolf damage management programs, including the investigation of injured and dead livestock, the capture and radio-collaring of wolves for research and other information-gathering purposes, and the direct removal of depredating wolves to resolve conflicts.

- Gray Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains
- Gray Wolves in the Western Great Lakes
- Mexican Gray Wolves in the Southwest

More Information

- Lines of Defense: Coping With Predators in the Rocky Mountain Region
- Livestock Protection Dogs on Public Lands: Protecting Sheep From Predators (Brochure) (299.16 KB)
- Livestock Protection Dogs on Public Lands: Protecting Sheep From Predators (Sign) (480.65 KB)

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