

Fact Sheet 2:

Assessing Livestock Operations and Choosing Best Methods for Avoiding Conflicts with Wolves

With the recent re-establishment of gray wolf populations in Washington State, many livestock producers are looking for additional tools they can use to avoid conflicts between livestock and wolves. In order to choose the best tools, first assess the livestock operation and the terrain and find out what is known about the presence of wolf packs and their habits in the area. WDFW or local Tribal governments will have information on the presence of wolves and wolf packs. Research has shown that developing a site-specific management plan is the single most important action a producer can take to avoid conflicts with wolves.

Location and Terrain

Large herds of livestock turned out on sizeable grazing allotments that include many acres of rugged terrain are the most difficult to protect from all types of predators. Carcass management alone can be a dilemma on remote grazing sites. It is more difficult for herders, range riders, and livestock managers to spot potential conflicts before they occur. Depending on where livestock are located, range-riders or herders may need to make more frequent livestock checks in areas known to be used by wolves. More herding and/or livestock guardian dogs may be needed. On the other hand, livestock kept behind fences near people or buildings derive protection from the proximity of human activity, especially during critical calving and lambing times, and are far less likely to fall prey to wolves and other predators.

Type, Age and Number of Livestock



Research has shown that when wolves attack livestock, they focus on the animals that are easiest to kill, like sheep, goats and calves, or yearlings as well as injured or sick animals. Wolves are far less likely to attack healthy adult cattle and horses. Some cattle breeds are more capable of fending off predators. Breeds like Texas Longhorn, Brahmans crossed with Angus and Herefords producing the breeds of Brangus and Brafordts (*top*) and Scottish Highland cattle (*bottom*) all exhibit a strong blend of mothering skills and aggression to predators. Some Washington State producers operating in wolf country have made the decision to switch livestock breeds for these reasons.



Human Presence and Vigilance

Loss of livestock to wolves can occur when a rancher is unaware of a nearby wolf pack and allows his animals to be moved near to or adjoining areas frequently used by wolves. WDFW or Tribal governments may have location information from radio-collared wolves that



Living with Livestock and Wolves: A Practical Guide to Avoiding Conflicts Through Non-lethal Means



can help avoid wolf and livestock conflict. Wolves tend to be more active at dawn and dusk, so that is the most important time for range rider presence. Responding quickly by hazing wolves that approach or chase livestock will cause them to feel threatened and will help curtail further activity. Increased human vigilance will also allow ranchers and range riders to find sick, injured, or dead animals more readily and remove them as a potential predator attractant. Determinations of the cause of depredations are easier to make when carcasses or injuries are fresh. Contact WDFW for specific wolf pack locations and the possibility of entering into a voluntary agreement for the sharing of wolf collar location information.

Timing and Seasonality

Timing of livestock turnout is an important consideration in avoiding conflicts with wolves. Keeping cow/calf pairs off the range until the wolves' natural deer and elk prey have given birth can prevent the temptation for hungry wolves to pick off small calves. Check with WDFW biologists to determine local ungulate calving times. Waiting to turn out cow/calf pairs has the additional advantage of letting the calves gain strength, size and weight before turnout. Stronger, larger animals are more difficult to pursue and may represent more risk of injury or death to the wolf.

When livestock guardian dogs are being used for herd protection it is essential to avoid placing them near wolf den sites in spring when wolves are breeding and pupping. Wolves will aggressively defend their young from other canines including dogs, coyotes, or other wolves that are not members of their pack. Using livestock guardian dogs in these areas during this critical time of year could actually increase the likelihood of conflicts with wolves, and put the guardian dogs at risk. Some studies have shown that using guardian dogs at other times of the year in combination with sheepherders or range riders may greatly reduce livestock depredation. However, livestock guardian dogs need appropriate training and handling. **See Fact Sheet #__ Livestock Guardian Animals.**

Keeping Records

For any conflict avoidance plan to work over time, good record keeping is helpful. Such a tracking system could record:

- Date, time and location of nonlethal control measures
- Weather, terrain and vegetation cover
- The effectiveness of nonlethal control measures used
- Records of wolf sightings and behavior
- Wolf and livestock response to avoidance strategies
- Related observations of livestock and wolf behavior.

(One Washington range rider noted that his horse usually detects when wolves are in the vicinity of the cattle herd before the humans.)

Tracking and analyzing the effectiveness of specific nonlethal control measures will help improve the effectiveness of preventative measures the following season.