

## Fact Sheet 3:

# Range Riders, Herders and Increased Human Presence



The use of range riders or herders to provide watch over herds of livestock, and to watch for signs of wolves and other predators, is one of the most effective methods for avoiding predator conflicts, particularly with wolves. Wolves are naturally wary of humans and will usually avoid livestock when humans are nearby. Herders or range-riders can also use noise, lights and motion to haze away any wolves that do approach livestock. Unlike cowboys of days gone by, range riders of today may perform their jobs using a variety of transportation methods: horseback, truck, ATV, or dirt bike/motorcycle. Tools they rely on include cell phones, computers, and radio-collar location information to keep cattle or sheep from venturing into areas where wolves are known to be present. Increased human activity provides an opportunity for better monitoring of livestock. Closer observation of the herd means that dead livestock can be more quickly located and removed, and sick or injured

animals can be isolated and treated before becoming an attractant for wolves.

### Choose an Experienced Range Rider or Herder

The most effective human presence is a seasoned range-rider who is constantly aware of his/her surroundings, is extremely familiar with the local terrain, and knows the characteristics of the livestock breed and behaviors. A good range-rider or herder has learned how to distinguish wolf signs from those of other predators and can assess conditions that may make livestock more vulnerable to wolves, avoiding these areas when possible.

#### Key Factors for Increasing Range Rider and Herder Effectiveness:

- Monitor the ranch or allotment regularly when wolves are most active, particularly at dawn and dusk.
- Pay particular attention to the behavior of horses and dogs. They are usually aware of wolf presence before humans can detect them.
- Record locations and wolf sign on a GPS device to help decide future grazing locations.
- Keep dogs close at hand in wolf country. Wolves may view dogs as rivals especially near a den or rendezvous site. Also, cattle may behave more aggressive towards dogs in wolf country.
- Be aware of the livestock's behavior. If they are unsettled, agitated, or seem alert and worried, wolves or other predators may be around. Watch for wolf tracks, scats, and hair by examining the ground.
- Consider modifying grazing practices. Bunch the cattle together and move them frequently. Livestock may need to "learn" this behavior through practice. It is more difficult for predators to isolate an animal from a tightly bunched herd than to pursue individual animals dispersed across the landscape.



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



## Other Points to Consider:

- Range-riding alone may not be sufficient to prevent wolf and livestock conflict. It is hard for a range rider to be everywhere at once. Dogs and range-riders make good teams.
- Cattle and sheep require the most protecting at vulnerable times such as calving, lambing and early turnout.
- Temporary fencing with fladry or turbo as a second line of protection as well as noise deterrents could prove useful during these times.

## Observing and Learning from Wolves

Range riders and herders have the unique opportunity to observe wolves first-hand and record their behavior and movements. Like humans, wolves prefer easy travel routes and will make use of paths, roadways, trails, lakeshores, ridges, and mountain passes to move through their territory. These are places a range rider is likely to find tracks and other sign, especially in soft ground or snow.

- Wolf tracks resemble those of a large dog, although tracks from the largest dogs, such as those used as livestock guard animals may actually be bigger than wolf tracks. (*See Fact Sheet 1*)
- Wolves must conserve their energy so they generally travel in straight lines leaving precise tracks. Domestic dog trails often exhibit back and forth movement and imprecise foot placement. Wolves howl to communicate among pack members.

## Wolf Den and Rendezvous Site Characteristics:

- Wolves begin denning in March, and usually bear young in April. Until mid-June, sometimes into July, packs usually stay close to the den and hunt nearby. However, pack members may travel for miles to bring food to the den for pups. Range-riders need to be tuned-in to these seasonal considerations.
- Range-riders should be able to identify den and rendezvous sites, and avoid these areas when grazing livestock. A rendezvous site is a partial clearing where adults move the pups when they are old enough to leave the den but still need supervision. The rendezvous site is typically littered with chewed-on bones and sticks, and wolf hair is evident as well as disturbed patches of ground. The pups may use one area as the communal "toilet" where their scat can be found. It appears like adult scat, only smaller.
- Dens are often found on south-facing slopes, which are less snow-covered in late winter. They are usually located near a water source.
- Dens are usually excavated in the ground, sometimes by enlarging the den of another animal. Den openings are approximately 1' to 2' in diameter, with depth ranging from 5' to 20'. Wolves may also den in hollow logs, root masses, or rock caves.
- Numerous tracks and trails are usually visible around den sites, due to the traffic of pack members coming and going.