

WILDLIFE FACTS



Non-Lethal Methods to Prevent Conflicts Between Predators and Livestock

Every year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program kills thousands of predators as a taxpayer-funded subsidy to the livestock industry, using controversial and inhumane methods such as poisons and aerial gunning. Wildlife Services largely ignores the many non-lethal ways to prevent conflicts between predators and livestock. In fact, a small, but growing number of ranchers are turning away from Wildlife Services' "sledgehammer" approach and emphasizing non-lethal conflict-prevention techniques because they recognize that predators are an integral part of the landscapes where they ranch.

Wildlife Services needs to end the use of inhumane, hazardous, and environmentally harmful poisons—specifically, Compound 1080 and sodium cyanide—to kill predators. Instead, the agency should employ non-lethal conflict prevention methods. Specifically, Wildlife Services, and the private parties it assists, should be required to use, or attempt to use, nonlethal deterrence methods before resorting to lethal control.

NON-LETHAL CONFLICT-PREVENTION TECHNIQUES

Successful non-lethal methods of conflict prevention include:

■ Guard Animals

While ranchers have used donkeys and llamas to harass and chase off predators that approach their livestock, guard dogs have generally proven the most effective. In some instances, the mere presence of dogs seems to deter predators. In other cases, dogs play a more active role by alerting humans to the presence of predators in the area. Karelian bear dogs have proven especially effective at scaring away bears from residences and campsites.



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■ Erecting Barriers

Permanent electric fences or combinations of wire mesh and electric fences have been very successful at keeping predators out of sheep and cow pastures, especially at times when predators are most active, such as nighttime and lambing and calving seasons. Portable fencing can also be used in open range situations to encircle livestock for a short period of time. For example, ranchers can erect fencing for a few hours while their livestock graze in a particular spot. In addition, fladry—a series of red or orange cloth flags which flap in the breeze when hung at intervals along a thin rope—has been shown to deter wolves, at least temporarily, during critical periods. Fladry can be used by itself or in conjunction with other types of fencing to increase the effectiveness of fencing. Turbofladry, which is an electrified version of fladry, has proven even more effective with wolves.

■ Scare Devices

Scare devices such as strobe lights, firecrackers, and noisemakers scare off predators and reduce their interest in entering or remaining in the area. For example, radio-activated guard systems (RAG boxes) fire strobe lights and sound alarms when triggered by the radio signals from approaching radio-collared wolves.

■ Reducing Attractants

Most predators have a very good sense of smell and can detect prey one or two miles away. Thus, an appealing scent is enough to attract a predator. Dead, diseased, or dying animals left in the open attract predators, as does the afterbirth from calving. Removing these attractants by burying or burning livestock carcasses or moving them to an offsite dump or composting site, rather than leaving them to rot, reduces the chances of attracting predators.



■ Increasing Human Presence with Livestock

Increasing human presence on the range with riders or herders is one of the most effective methods of non-lethal conflict prevention. This technique allows livestock producers to keep an eye on their livestock and on any wolf, bear, or lion activity in the area. For example, a range rider can patrol a ranch or allotment at dawn and dusk when wolves are most active, checking for unusual signs of agitation in the cattle that indicate predators are in the area, and looking for tracks, scat, and hair. The goals of increased human presence are twofold: (1) to scare predators away from the area, and (2) to allow ranchers to find and remove sick, injured, or dead livestock quickly.

■ Herding for Deterrence

Some ranchers have successfully warded off predators by modifying their herding practices to emulate that of bison—which are much better at defending themselves against wolves, bears, and coyotes. To do this, ranchers teach their livestock to stay together in a tight bunch instead of dispersing widely to graze. Such a herd structure often scares off predators since it is much more difficult and risky for predators to isolate an animal from a tightly bunched herd than to pursue individual animals dispersed across the landscape.

END LETHAL METHODS TO PREVENT PREDATOR AND LIVESTOCK CONFLICTS

Non-lethal conflict prevention benefits not only predators, but the environment as a whole as predators serve a critical role in balancing our ecosystems. In addition, non-lethal methods cost less, saving taxpayers more money. To ensure that Wildlife Services steers away from lethal methods, Congress must pass legislation banning the use of Compound 1080 and sodium cyanide, and encourage the use of non-lethal techniques that benefit everyone.