

Nonlethal Approaches to Wildlife Damage Management

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ABSTRACT: Lethal wildlife management, especially that of large predators, is particularly controversial in the public eye. By contrast, proactive nonlethal approaches, including different livestock husbandry strategies, strategic grazing, guard animals, electric fencing and temporary fencing, can reduce, if not avoid, negative attention generated by lethal control. We have worked with producers on the ground for over 20 years to prevent and mitigate wildlife-livestock conflicts. Wildlife damage management is often viewed and conducted remedially to damage that has already occurred. However, we encourage a different paradigm, where conflict is prevented. Working with producers, communities, state, federal and tribal agencies, and local governments we have pioneered the use of a range of nonlethal tools and strategies for preventing wildlife-livestock conflict. Defenders' programs include polar bears, prairie dogs, bison, wolves, grizzly bears, and Florida panthers. Over the past 7 years, Defenders has managed a program using only nonlethal tools to protect over 25,000 sheep grazing annually in the "sheep super-highway" in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho, with losses of less than 30 sheep, and no wolves. We present preliminary findings of this community-based project, The Wood River Wolf Project, as evidence that nonlethal approaches to wolf-sheep conflict can be used to significantly reduce depredation and loss. Another of our non-lethal programs assists landowners and producers prevent conflicts with grizzly bears, through bear-resistant electric fencing incentives. This program, active since 2010, reimburses the landowner 50% of the cost of the bear-resistant electric fence around bear "attractants", such as chicken coops, beehives, fruit trees, livestock and compost piles. The program has resulted in over 150 fences installed in high priority conflict zones within Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Using a proactive nonlethal approach can mitigate or prevent wildlife-livestock conflict, circumventing the public response to remedial lethal control. Proactive solutions may also be applied to a greater number of livestock operations, not just those experiencing conflict, but those that may. Here we feature two significant conflict prevention programs that use different approaches, with the potential for application elsewhere or on a broader level.

Key Words: community-based, nonlethal tools, wildlife-livestock conflicts

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