



Backgrounder on Wolf Bounty Programs

After being shut down more than 40 years ago in Canada, numerous counties in Alberta and Saskatchewan are offering bounty payments once again to kill wolves and coyotes¹, mainly for the perceived benefit to ranchers. Cyclic wolf killing programs are not new to North America² but it is a wonder that they continue despite all of the evidence against them. Bounties are ineffective and unacceptable from an economical, ethical and ecological point of view¹.

"Predator bounty programs have been found to be ineffective by wildlife professionals, and they use killing methods that cause needless suffering and jeopardize wildlife conservation programs," (Proulx and Rodtka 2015).

Increased depredation rates following the indiscriminate killing of wolves:

Substantial research shows that when wolves are indiscriminately killed, families experience pack disintegration (loss of social stability regardless of population size) which can lead to increased prey killed per capita and more conflicts with livestock^{3,4,5}. Indiscriminate killing is counter-productive as it results in smaller packs and an increase in lone and dispersing wolves, which are more prone to kill livestock as they are less capable of taking down wild prey, especially if they lack experience and group work passed down by their elders. Hunted wolf populations also face higher stress hormone and reproductive hormone levels⁶, which can be detrimental to long-term health and may exacerbate social chaos and conflicts with livestock. It is of great importance to recognize that not all wolves or coyotes kill livestock. Many of the animals killed for bounty rewards have never encountered domestic stock and likely never would.

False claims that expenses for prevention are too high

Municipal districts using bounties have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in recent years to people who bring in dead wolves and coyotes, only to have vacant territories filled in by the same species within a few years. The resilient reproductive nature of exploited wild canids does not excuse our butchery of these highly evolved animals. Real investments include non lethal PREVENTATIVE measures that LAST. Below are listed some examples of investments that have ongoing effectiveness:

Erecting barriers: Fladry , Electric Fencing, or Turbofladry

Patrolling the landscape: Livestock Guardian Dogs, establishing a human presence using herders or range-riders

Removing Attractants: Carcass Removal Programs,

Other commonly used and successful husbandry techniques include:

Night-penning;

Confining or concentrating flocks during periods of vulnerability;

Synchronizing birthing to reduce the period of maximum vulnerability; and

Pasturing young animals in areas with little cover and in close proximity to humans.

If a producer can remain "unattractive" to natural predators by promptly managing for dead and sick livestock, as well as maintaining a strong human presence, livestock depredation rates should decrease in most areas.

Husbandry practices where predators share the landscape with domestic stock can have a major influence on whether or not wolves will be attracted to an area.

Putting Things into Perspective

Currently, there is no known place in North America where livestock is the majority of wolf prey. This is not always the case in other countries where wolf populations have been all but decimated, such as Europe and Asia. Wolves account for approximately 1 – 3 % of livestock losses on a large scale in North America, with weather, calving, and digestive problems a far larger concern for producers.

It is also paramount to consider the benefits and costs involved in ecosystem services that are provided for by wolves as a top predator and keystone species. Wolves help to maintain the health, balance and biodiversity of natural ecosystems.

Sustainability embraces a land ethic. Aldo Leopold described this basic principal in the following way, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” Local sustainability is not just about taking care of the people in our community; it also requires stewardship of the plants, animals, land and water around us.

For more information or a list of resources, please download a copy of Wolf Awareness Inc.'s **"A Rancher's Guide; Coexistence Among Livestock, People and Wolves"** from our website: www.WolfAwarenessInc.org. We are **currently updating this guide** for its second print.

Citations:

1. Gilbert Proulx and Dwight Rodtka (2015). **Predator Bounties in Western Canada Cause Animal Suffering and Compromise Wildlife Conservation Efforts.** *Animals* 5, 1034-1046.
2. Marco Musiani and Paul Paquet (2004). **The Practices of Wolf Persecution, Protection, and Restoration in Canada and the United States.** *Bioscience* 54 (1): 50 - 60.
3. Wielgus RB, Peebles KA (2014) **Effects of Wolf Mortality on Livestock Depredations.** *PLoS ONE* 9(12).
4. Linda Y. Rutledge, Brent R. Patterson , Kenneth J. Mills , Karen M. Loveless, Dennis L. Murray , Bradley N. White (2009). **Protection from harvesting restores the natural social structure of eastern wolf packs.** *Biological Conservation* 143 (2010): 332–339.
5. Arian D. Wallach, Euan G. Ritchie, John Read, Adam J. O'Neill. (2009). **More than Mere Numbers: The Impact of Lethal Control on the Social Stability of a Top-Order Predator.** *PLoS ONE* 4(9).
6. Bryan, H.M., Smits, J.E.G., Koren, L., Paquet, P.C., Wynne-Edwards, K. E., and Musiani, M. 2014. **Heavily hunted wolves have higher stress and reproductive hormones than wolves with lower hunting pressure.** *Functional Ecology*.



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