



## Predator Friendly Ranching

*"Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land" ~Aldo Leopold*

**by: Louise Liebenberg, B.Sc.**

*"Predator Friendly® grew out of a conversation between a sheep rancher and a conservationist. Each recognized the keystone role of native predators and farms to conservation. The question arose why not let consumers know about farms who practice good wildlife stewardship? In 1991, a coalition of ranchers, conservationists and clothing manufacturers began to certify wool growers using Predator Friendly® practices. In 2003, the program expanded to include producers of meats, eggs, honey and more." [www.predatorfriendly.org]. This program has now been amalgamated with Wildlife Friendly, "a global community dedicated to the development and marketing of products that conserve threatened wildlife while contributing to the economic vitality of rural communities." [www.wildlifefriendly.org]*

Being Predator Friendly is more than just a way to market products. To us, it is a way of life, where conserving the native wildlife, and ranching go hand in hand. Simply stated, it is about sharing the land with our wild neighbors. Co-existence.

Cowboys, horses and cattle are iconic symbols of the west. Ranching is regarded by many as a noble pursuit, feeding the world and being good stewards of the land. The ranching lobby is a persuasive group.

After the large scale extermination of predators in the 1930's in the US, many ranchers lost their tolerance and knowledge to deal with predators. Many feel they have the right to ranch without the threat of predation. Many have become complacent about looking after their stock.

It is primarily this persuasive voice of the ranching lobby that calls for culls, bounties and removal of predators. This call is heard by government, and the response is usually one that involves lethal control of predators. The USDWS killed close to 90 000 predators in 2011, with the total number of animals killed by wildlife services that year was just under 4 million, nationwide. [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\_damage/prog\_data/2010\_prog\_data/index.shtml].



### How big is the predation problem?

Livestock mortalities caused directly by predation were/are less than a quarter of one percent, (0.23%, of the American cattle inventory was lost to native carnivores and dogs in 2010, according to a Department of Agriculture report). The top 5 causes of mortality in cattle could be attributed to respiratory problems (26%), digestive problems (13%), complications while calving (12%), weather (12%) and "unknown" non-predator causes (11%).

For the sheep industry, four percent (4%) of the U.S. total sheep inventory are killed each year by carnivores such as coyotes and dogs, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Even in Western states, native carnivores kill few sheep. Far more sheep die from health problems, lambing complications, and erratic weather.



*“Despite decades of predator control lethal predator controls do not benefit sheep growers. Market forces place a larger role in the decline of the sheep industry. On the other hand, large-scale predator eradications are biologically expensive, inherently non-selective, and there is little to no correlation between the number of coyotes killed and the number of lambs lost”.* [www.wildearthguardians.org]

It is time for the ranching community to move away from the expectation that the government or society will solve their predation problems. Their focus should shift to preventing conflicts and implementing more non lethal control measures.

Times are changing, ranching is changing and consumers are becoming more knowledgeable about what they eat. This is reflected in the buy local movement, organic food trend and the awareness of factory farming, debates on pesticide use and other ag related issues. Consumers are often not aware of the keystone role that predators play in keeping eco-systems intact, healthy and bio diverse. The land needs its predators to stay vital and healthy.



Livestock and predators remains a volatile subject.

The public lands debate in the US is a prime example of this volatility; where there are two strong lobbies, pro wolf or anti wolf, pro conservation, anti ranching. For many, it is an “either /or” discussion. What is missing in these discussions is balance, where the land can be shared with ranchers and of course the wildlife. The one does not have to exclude the other.

Predator Friendly Ranching is about finding this balance, being willing to change, tolerance, conflict avoidance and being truly good stewards of the land. Traditionally, the reaction to livestock predation has been to shoot, trap, poison, removal, and relocation (in the case of endangered species). These are “band aid solution” to a gaping wound. Finding long term, sustainable, non lethal solutions require a change in mindset, management practices and animal husbandry practices.

With an appropriate plan, a good assessment, facilitation, practical solutions and knowledge, ranchers can move towards co-existence, resulting in less conflict and depredation. With that said, there will always be livestock depredations; it is an illusion to think that predation will never occur. By having a plan in place, the rancher will be more prepared to deal with predation issues as they arise.



Just as many businesses (and ranching is a business) requires a Business Plan or a Financial Plan. Ranchers need to start working on a whole system **Predator Management Plan**, having a guideline to work to and an emergency plan in place in the event of predation.



Ranchers like to have goal orientated solutions, there is no “one size fits all” approach to managing predation. Some solutions could include:

Aversion	Exclusion	Management	Human Activity	Guardian Animals	Terrain
Bangers Rag Boxes Fox Lights Taste aversion	Fencing Electric Fencing Flady Turbo Fladry	Birthing times Night Corralling Removal of sick and weak Breeding Hay predation Rodent control Elk Carcass Disposal	Range riders Shepherding Hunting Text messages	Dogs Donkeys Llamas Multi species grazing Mixed age groups	Removal of brushy piles Sub dividing water courses Proximity to dump Pasture rotation



The battle to protect livestock will always be ongoing. In some instances lethal control will be necessary; however it should be the last resort.

**Sometimes, tolerance needs to be bought.**

The profit margins in cattle and sheep ranching are tiny, family farms often have a very small operating budget, time is often an issue, frustration, fear and the heart break of seeing (prized and often loved) animals predated on, are valid reasons for ranchers wanting culls and bounties on wildlife.



**Compensation programs** are an excellent way to convince people to co-exist (the compensation program paid by Defenders of Wildlife was one of the ways to move the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone forward). However, compensation for livestock depredations should only be paid; if the rancher can show that they have done all that they could to prevent predation in the first place.

**Subsidies** to build fences, or set up fladry, on farm composting sites, guardian animals, labour, monitoring

**Economic stability**, influencing market prices may be difficult however niche markets such as tourism (Wolf watching), range riders, marketing of products (Predator/Wildlife Friendly) and recognition could provide some more economic stability, the spin offs could be beneficial to the whole community.

We need to work with conservationists, government (who are notorious for ignoring predation research, Woodland Caribou recovery is a good example of this), and ranchers to be more **proactive** in non lethal predator management.

We need to educate, offer goal orientated solutions, have understanding of each others situation and teach what the value of in tact eco-systems are, we need predators on the landscape.

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***The most important environmental issue is one that is rarely mentioned,  
and that is the lack of a conservation ethic in our culture***

~Gaylord Nelson

