

Conflict Management REDUCTION IS THE KEY!

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A year or so ago I was asked if I thought that having a government funded program, such as the BCCA administered Livestock Protection Program, resulted in a reliance by producers in the program to the extent that they were less apt to be self-reliant when it came to on-farm practices. After all, if government money is available why spend your own time and money to take a proactive approach to reduce the likelihood of predator conflicts with livestock?

The comment had several layers to it and after responding I thought long about whether or not my response was accurate. And I wondered what beyond the obvious, are producers doing out there that is working for them.

One of the cornerstones of the Livestock Protection Program is that producer's must follow Best Management Practices (BMP's) in order to be eligible for either of the two primary benefits of the program, compensation and mitigation. I have discussed BMP's in other Beef in BC columns (now accessible on the BCCA Website under Programs/ Livestock Protection Program). If at some point during the verification or mitigation process, a verifier, a Wildlife Specialist or a Conservation Officer notices an on farm practice that appears to be contributing to the predator conflict in an egregious nature, then program services may be denied. Fortunately this occurs rarely. On average only one or two files a year are denied services due to a lack of BMP's, less than half of one percent!

In fact it seems that many producers, especially those in cattle and larger sheep operations want to be part of the solution. Many want to do the mitigating themselves or at the very least figure out how to help make mitigation more successful. Some producers are licenced trappers or hunter

or have family members who are and several are even contracted to work as Wildlife Specialists under our program. This makes them well positioned to deal with their own issues as well as those of their neighbors. Generational family farms and ranches have had to deal with predators long before government funded programs became available and the concept of self-sufficiency carries on.

Although compensation payments take the sting out of verified losses it does not fully cover the real economic burden producers have to deal with when predators become a problem. Livestock loss surveys indicate that only around ten percent of suspected predator kills are found and verified. Harassment by predators can also lead to livestock weight losses, lower reproductive rates and of course injuries that might render an animal unsaleable or have to be sold at a much reduced price. Reducing conflicts in the first place must be a goal of all producers. The BCCA website has a brochure titled Cattle and Sheep Best Management Practices to Reduce Livestock Predation. The document provides some good advice on ways to mitigate losses. Some are really quite basic and should be standard operating procedures in every farm and ranch operation while there are more specific. As the Program Coordinator for

the Livestock Protection Program I spend a lot of time on the phone speaking with ranchers about their predator problems, about what works for them and what doesn't and exploring ideas that might put less strain on their bottom line. Often times I will be chatting with a producer and they will explain an approach that they have taken with great success. One of the best examples that I have come across is that of one of BC's largest sheep operations found in the Vanenby area east of Clearwater just off the North Thompson River.

The Aveley Heritage Sheep Ranch was founded in 1906 and has passed through four generations. They traditionally have run over 1000 ewes but as with many producers in the province, they have downsized somewhat while working through feed and drought issues. Their sheep range from valley bottom deeded land to high elevation subalpine summer pasture. Of course doing so exposes the sheep to a substantial risk of predation both on the home ranch and on summer pastures. Despite the Moilliet family's commitment to stellar best management practices which includes continuous shepherding and the use of several livestock guardian dogs, predator losses were a frustrating and disheartening part of doing business. In 2021 alone the

Livestock Protection Program received 11 verified loss files with a total of 13 sheep being killed and two more documented injuries. Of the 11 files four involved bears, three wolves, three coyotes and one cougar. They have had years where they have lost up to 70 head but finding the carcasses in such vast grazing areas in order to verify has rarely been possible. Compensation, therefore, was paid on only a small portion of their overall losses. Targeted removal of offending predators was an ongoing process both by the Moilliets themselves and by LPP Wildlife Specialists. But still, frustration ran high and the family knew that there had to be a better way. The majority of their attacks were occurring at night under the cover of darkness. The guardian dogs were doing their jobs but they had a lot of ground to cover. The Moilliets knew that the more concentrated the herd was and the smaller the area they and their guardian dogs were protecting, the more effective their efforts would be. They also surmised that what would keep the sheep in, might also keep predators out. Joseph Moilliet started experimenting with electric fencing and the perimeter electric fence worked well to confine the sheep and it even worked as a deterrent to keep some predators out. Valerie Gerber recently told me of how one coyote found its way inside the perimeter fence and after being encouraged to vacate chose to try and run past the guardian dogs as opposed to risk

another fence zap. Still some losses were occurring and that's when Joseph started experimenting with electric fence netting to create night penning enclosures. Electric fence netting can quickly be rolled out and attached to temporary step-in posts. He places salt, minerals and water in the enclosures and at the end of the day the sheep are excited to enter the area where they get their fill and are content to bed down for the night. The electric night penning corral is moved with the sheep throughout their late spring, summer and fall pastures. During the winter when the temporary posts used for the netting can't be easily pushed into the frozen ground the perimeter electric fence continues to do its job. Since the start of 2022 when the Aveley Ranch started using their electric fencing and night penning program they have not had to verify a single predator loss. Not one!

The Aveley Ranch electric fence experience is truly a success story and a wonderful example of how a non-lethal deterrent has all but eliminated their predator losses. Does your cattle or sheep operation have a success story that has helped proactively reduce predator conflicts? I would love to hear about what is working for you. Feel free to give me a call or send me an email.

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Night penning keeps the sheep in and the predators out



Joseph Moilliet filling water tubs. The sheep are excited to enter the pens at night for water, salt and minerals as well as a safe bedding area



Electric fence netting used by the Aveley Heritage Sheep Ranch

Further information about the Livestock Protection Program can be found at www.cattlemen.bc.ca/lpp.htm

For incidents of cattle or sheep losses, injury or harassment where wolves, coyotes or birds are suspected please call our toll free number **1-844-852-5788**.

For incidents involving other wildlife such as bear and cougar please contact the COS RAPP line at **1-877-952-7277**.