

Wolves A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Submitted by Cam Hill, Program Coordinator, Livestock Protection Program • Photos from LPP File



Cam Hill, Program Coordinator
Livestock Protection Program

“**T**his is the Wolfinglyest blasted country there ever was.” My old friend Hank was in his 80’s when he burst through the local government Access Center door with that announcement. Although Hank was no longer fleet of foot he still kind of burst everywhere he went. Hank often had a creative way with words but his message was generally quite clear. In this case it was that we had wolves ... and we had lots of them.

That exchange occurred about 15 plus years ago. We still have wolves in the Nechako Valley but recently complaints from ranchers are down substantially. In fact, in 2022 only four conflicts were

verified by the Livestock Protection Program and three of the four were on the same ranch, likely being caused by the same pack of bandits. That’s a far cry from where we were back in the

days when Hank was all stirred up. I vividly recall standing on my deck one cold winter evening and hearing the howling of wolves from three different packs, the Blue Mountain pack off to



the east, a pack running the Nechako River with their turnaround point about five kilometers to the south of us and the local bunch of six that just killed a yearling steer of mine. This band of roughians mostly hung out on the northern edge of the agriculture belt with occasional forays on to farms and ranches. My place is situated on the Southeast corner of their territory and as I am up on a bit of a ridge overlooking the Nechako Valley it seemed that my land was well situated for them to gather and shout insults at their rival packs. A few years prior when I first moved on to our property and while my wife and I were busy building our house, we lived in an old skid shack. The shack was the only building on the 400 acre property when we bought it and so we hauled it up near our future building site. We threw a door and some windows in it and called it home for that first winter. For the most part the walls weren't insulated and when the wind blew hard out of the north our pant legs would billow as the breeze blew up through the knot holes in the floor. Many nights we were serenaded to sleep by the howling of wolves. The howling of a wolf, along with the screaming of a bull elk and the singing of loons, are all sounds that always seem to add a little bit of specialness' to a day. But that specialness' was lost the night the wolves came into our yard and killed our three-year-old yellow lab.

Losing cattle to wolves is disheartening to say the least. But there is some level of understanding and perhaps acceptance of the risk when your livestock are sharing range with wild predators. But when wolves come into your yard and attack pets, it's a personal space violation that cuts much deeper. Sometimes it's hard to reconcile your love for all things wild when their presence results in emotional distress. And to be clear, when losses have financial implications that too can take an emotional toll. Frustrations can be

at their worse when there appears to be no end in sight or no help offered from governments or others with a conflicting interest in the overabundance of a species. We see that with elk and their impact to crops and stored feed and we have seen that with rising populations of grizzly bears in populated areas where in recent times their passings were less frequent. With wolves though, there is a certain brutality that accompanies the way they kill. It's what they do and it's as nature intended but their lack of compassion for their prey is hard for us humans to reconcile. But are we any better? I hope so but that has not always been the case. It's somewhat of a paradox that historically we humans have invoked a similar brutality in the way we have targeted wolves.

In the early 90's, I was on a horse trip in the northern part of the province when my large golden retriever, Boone, became the unintended consequence of someone's desperate attempt to deal with a species imbalance. Wild ungulate populations were way down and wolf numbers were high. It seems they had made a rapid recovery from the two years of extensive aerial shooting that occurred throughout the area in 1984 and 1985. From my horse that day, I noticed Boone chewing on something alongside the trail. I instructed him to drop, which he did, but only a few slobbery leaves were spat out. We continued on our way and a short while later, Boone went into convulsions. I spent an hour, maybe two, on the ground holding his big old head as his body was racked with pain and convulsions. I could do nothing to help him and had I a gun I would have ended it. It was a death I would not wish on any living thing. I eventually was able to dig a suitable hole in the ground using a stick and an old elk shoulder blade I found nearby. I slipped Boone's lifeless body into it and covered him well. I knew he had been poisoned but did not know what type of poison was involved and, as well as the need for a respectful

burial, I was also concerned about the secondary poisoning of scavengers. At that time, no poisons were legal for use in the province other than limited use of Compound 1080 by government and only for dealing with livestock/wolf conflicts. The nearest cattle were over 200 kms away so I was quite sure that 1080 was not the culprit. Strychnine had long been banned but its illegal use was still known to occur. Lethal cocktails of various rat poisons were also rumored to be effective in targeting wolves. As mentioned earlier a lot of emotions can surface at the loss of a beloved pet. But after the anger passed, I thought long about the frustrations that would lead individuals to utilize illegal and unethical measures, often at great risks to themselves, in order to deal with real or perceived wildlife imbalances. Was government at fault for not having an action plan or management plan that would address rising wolf population concerns? Were special user groups from Ontario and the US to blame for pressuring government and BC's own citizens to move away from culls to restore balances?

There are a lot of ways to kill wolves. Poison being one that thankfully was outlawed in this province back in the early 90's. A CO friend of mine in the interior of the province was recently telling me of finding several old rusty homemade "wolf hooks" down in the southern part of his district. These hooks would at one time have been hung from trees by chains several feet off the ground and baited with meat. Wolves would jump to grab the meat and would hook themselves thus enduring horrific and prolonged suffering before death. Over the years I have heard of many other savage ways that wolves were targeted, methods that I find even too horrible to write about here.

If the selective removal of wolves, or any predator, is deemed necessary, then it must be done as humanely as possible and with some level of compassion for

the species and individuals involved. That concept is not novel and is well accepted by the majority of modern day trappers and hunters. Although the Mountain Caribou Recovery Program utilizes aerial shooting as its only means of removing wolves the method is currently under attack by special interest groups opposed to the cull. In my opinion, there is no other tool in the tool box that is more humane, more measurable, more species specific with no incidental losses than that approach. If we agree as a society that some wolves need to be killed, for whatever reason, then why would we be critical of the most successful and most humane option available?

The Livestock Protection Program is highly regulated and operates under a permit issued by the Ministry of Forests. There are many checks and balances written into the permit that ensure

mitigation actions are target specific, humanly done and with measurable results. Our options for canid removal are limited to only ground shooting during daylight hours, foot hold traps and killing snares of which can only be used during a short specified period. As with all trapping in BC only certified traps that meet or exceed specific animal welfare thresholds may be used. The BC Trappers Association continues to set a global standard in safe and humane trapping techniques and those of us involved with the Livestock Protection Program are acutely aware of the importance of maintaining those high standards.

Bringing wolf numbers down to a balance point and maintaining them at a particular level will ultimately lead to far less wolves being killed than allowing numbers to peak and then implementing a cull on a larger scale.

That's just good management. Targeted removal of offending packs and/or individuals along with improved best management practices by producers is working in many parts of the province. The Nechako Valley, at least, is no longer the wolfingiest part of the country.


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

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.

Angus * Charolais * Gelbvieh * Hereford * Simmental

LIVE INTERNET BIDDING AVAILABLE!




Early Bird Viewing Friday 1-5pm
Sale Starts Saturday
April 8th 1:00pm
BC LIVESTOCK YARD - VANDERHOOF

SHOP WITH CONFIDENCE!
All Bulls are Sifted by a
Committee of Commercial
Cattlemen, Semen Tested &
Evaluated by a Veterinarian.

11 - Consignors
37 - Yearlings Bulls
10 - 2 Year-Old Bulls
Replacement Heifers Start The Sale!

For more information
or to request a catalogue:
Janice Tapp:
250-699-6466



48TH ANNUAL VANDERHOOF ALL BREEDS BULL SALE
47 Bulls Consigned & 3 Open Replacement Heifers

SATURDAY
APRIL 8th, 2023
SALE STARTS 1:00 PM

SALE LOCATED AT:
BC LIVESTOCK CO-OP
Vanderhoof Sale Yard
Office Phone: 250-567-4333

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL:
Chairperson: Mike Wheeler: 250-567-4764
Secretary: Janice Tapp: 250-699-6466

DLMS INTERNET BIDDING AVAILABLE
www.dlms.ca

