Documenting Predator Impacts on Livestock

3 steps to take when finding a suspected kill

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Introduction

Livestock depredation is a growing concern in the Sacramento Valley and Sierra Nevada regions. Coyotes, mountain lions and black bears are the most common predators in our environment; gray wolves are moving into the Sierra Nevada region. If you find a suspected livestock kill and wish to determine the source of depredation, there are several critical steps to preserving evidence and contacting wildlife specialists. In addition to direct impacts (death or injury), these predators may have indirect impacts on livestock production as well (including impacts to reproduction, livestock performance, and labor costs). Producers can also take steps to document these impacts.

1. Preserving Evidence

If you find a dead animal that you suspect was killed by a predator (or even if the cause of death is not readily apparent) there are a number of steps you should take to preserve the evidence:

1. Minimize your own impact. Watch where you step. Do not walk on tracks (from wildlife or livestock).
2. Cover tracks with cans, buckets or similar objects to protect them from further disturbance.
3. Take photographs of the carcass and surrounding areas (especially signs of struggle, tracks, fur, or other evidence).
4. If possible, keep other livestock, people and dogs away from the scene.
5. Cover the carcass with a tarp to prevent scavengers and/or other predators from feeding on the carcass.
6. Mark the location using flagging, global-position-system (GPS) coordinates, or your smartphone camera. This will help investigators find the site easily.

2. Contacting Wildlife Services or County Wildlife Specialists

Determining the cause of death (whether from predation, disease, or natural causes) can be helpful in preventing additional losses. If you suspect predation, contact the USDA Wildlife Services regional supervisor or county wildlife specialist:

- USDA Wildlife Services State Office: (916) 979-2675
- USDA Wildlife Services North District (Jim Shuler): (530) 336-5623
- USDA Wildlife Services Sacramento District (Ryan McCreary): (619) 666-6418
- Placer County Wildlife Services: (530) 889-7372

3. Depredation permits

If an investigation by Wildlife Services determines that a mountain lion was responsible for the depredation, you can work with Wildlife Services to obtain a depredation permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Similarly, if a black bear was responsible, CDFW can issue a depredation permit outside of the designated black bear hunting season. In addition, the California Fish and Game Code states, "that any bear that is encountered while in the act of inflicting injury to, molesting, or killing livestock may be taken immediately by the owner of the livestock or the owner's employee if the taking is reported no later than the next working day to the Department and the carcass is made available to the Department" (F&G Code §4181.1).

Butte County 530.538.7201 • Plumas/Sierra Counties 530.283.6262
Placer County 530.889.7385 • Nevada County 530.273.4563 • Sutter/Yuba Counties 530.822.7515

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IF YOU SUSPECT A WOLF

As of June 2018, CDFW has documented gray wolves in the Sierra Nevada as far south as Nevada County. Wolves are currently protected under both the state and federal endangered species acts; under the California law, lethal control of wolves is not permitted under any circumstance. According to CDFW, "non-injurious harassment [of wolves] is allowed when wolves are within 0.25 miles of livestock, or within 100 yards of a dwelling, agricultural structure, campsite, or commercial facility."

If you suspect that wolves may have killed livestock, contact both Wildlife Services and the CDFW Wolf Program Coordinator (Vicky Monroe: (916) 358-1356). Investigators will search the kill site for predator sign (including tracks, hair and scat) and will examine the livestock carcass to document injuries (including bite marks and tissue damage) and cause of death. Upon completion of the investigation, CDFW will issue a Livestock Loss Determination. Currently, there are no programs in California to compensate livestock producers for losses to wolves or other predators.

For more information regarding gray wolves in California, go to https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=112302&inline.

DOCUMENTING INDIRECT IMPACTS

Research in other Western states suggests that indirect losses from predators are more complex, and perhaps costlier to producers than direct losses. Indirect impacts can include reduced weight gain, reduced reproductive success, and additional labor (mostly associated with repairing infrastructure, treating injured livestock, and utilizing nonlethal livestock protection tools). Ranchers should document these costs by tracking weaning weights and rates, conception and birthing rates, and direct labor costs. Your local UC Cooperative Extension farm advisor can help you develop systems to track these impacts.

LIVESTOCK PROTECTION TOOLS

While there is no single livestock protection tool that will work in every situation or to protect livestock from every predator, there are a number of tools (and combinations of tools) that may help prevent losses. For more information on specific tools, see *Livestock Protection Tools for California Ranchers* (ANR Publication 8598), available online at http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8598.pdf.

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