

Education Goes Both Ways with Wolf Depredations

by Carter Niemeyer

Wolf depredations on livestock are emotional events that require thorough investigation and good communication. It takes only one phone call by an unhappy rancher for a depredation to turn political and be accompanied by a media circus.

I have built trusting relationships with ranchers by listening and being objective. Before I investigate a kill,

I listen to what the ranch family tells me. I always express empathy, but I also remind them that livestock die and can be killed in many ways. If I can establish that their animal was killed by wolves, I may suggest that we radio-collar a single wolf to find out how many wolves are in the area, and how problematic their presence could be.

My first objective is to stop the depredations. If that can be accom-

plished using nonlethal means, then wolves fare better, but I analyze each situation to see what kind of latitude the rancher will give me. I must abide by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policies, so I try to ensure that the rancher and I understand each other's positions.

I've found that trust and communication are the most important elements in resolving conflicts. In some cases wolves must die, but in all cases education goes both ways. Giving ranchers the opportunity to express their feelings about wolves (and about the govern-



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ment) is the first step toward better cooperation and understanding among all of us.

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Above: Carter Niemeyer investigates wolf depredations on livestock. One aspect of his job is that sometimes wolves must be killed when nonlethal means do not stop the depredations.

Left: Niemeyer has found trust and communication to be the most important elements in resolving conflicts over wolf depredations.



Jonathan Chapman

Those promoting wolf conservation need to teach people not only about the ecological importance of this keystone species but also about who makes wildlife management decisions and how to reach and influence those people.

Educating for Change

by Nina Fascione

Education is the first step in wildlife advocacy. How can someone argue for a cause unless they are informed about the topic and understand how the political process works? Those promoting wolf conservation need to teach people not only why they should care about wolves—the ecological importance of this keystone species and the moral imperative to restore an animal decimated by human actions—but also about who makes wildlife management decisions and how to reach and influence those people.

There are examples from across the country of educated citizens aiding wolf recovery. Informed Oregonians recently defeated 10 bills that would have gutted protections for wolves in their state. In Vermont, wolf advocates halted proposed legislation that would have prohibited wolf reintroduction there.

And Alaska citizens have twice voted to ban the practice of aerial wolf control.

Advocacy brings together individuals whose voices might otherwise be lost. A single voice may not have much power, but there is strength in numbers. As with wolves, the chorus is heard not with a lone howl but the combined vocalizations of a pack. As Dr. Fred Harrington discovered and R. D. Lawrence stated in *In Praise of Wolves*, “when a pack calls in unison, the varying pitch of their voices may deceive a listener into believing that the number of wolves in the group is greater than it actually is.” Similarly, human activists can make more noise and consequently achieve greater conservation successes through the combined efforts of informed individuals. ■

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