

Executive summary

Three ground-breaking livestock loss reports prepared by the Humane Society of the United States show that predators kill less than one percent of the cattle and sheep inventories nationwide

In the United States, data show that cougars, grizzly bears and wolves kill few cattle and sheep. Even though the most recent data published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA) was highly exaggerated when compared with data collected by states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the agency found that grizzly bears, wolves and cougars cause **far fewer than one percent** of unwanted cattle-calf or sheep losses by inventory. Their data show that farmers and ranchers lose nine times more cattle and sheep to health, weather, birthing and theft problems than to all predators combined.

In our three reports, we present our analysis of the USDA's data sets for cattle and sheep deaths in cougar-, grizzly bear- and wolf-occupied states (excluding Alaska). We compare the USDA's livestock data to those of other governmental bodies that also collect this information, which corroborates our findings that while the USDA's predation figures are significantly exaggerated, they are still nominal when compared to livestock mortalities from health, weather, theft and birthing problems (we refer to these livestock losses as "maladies").

For instance:

- **Wolves report:** In the Northern Rocky Mountains, the USDA claims wolves killed 4,360 cattle in 2015, while the FWS verified only 161 such losses that year.
- **Grizzly bear report:** For 2015, the USDA claimed grizzly bears killed 3,162 cattle in *nine* states. Yet, grizzly bears only live in four U.S. states: Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. (The USDA did not examine livestock losses in Alaska.) In other words, the USDA attributed cattle losses to grizzly bears in six states where none live. In the lower 48 states, Montana has the most resident grizzly bears. Yet the Montana's Board of Livestock's data show that between 2015 and 2018, cattle losses from grizzly bears numbered 61 or less, annually.
- **Cougar report:** The USDA's cattle loss data to cougars are 69 percent greater than those reported by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), the state with the third largest cougar population. The CPW reported 64 losses to all livestock (not just cattle) in 2015, while the USDA attributed 208 cattle-only losses to cougars in Colorado in 2015. Again, the USDA attributed livestock losses to cougars in states where they are absent.

We describe humane, efficacious and cost-effective non-lethal methods for livestock protection, and show that only a fraction of cattle and sheep growers in the U.S. use these methods to protect their herds. Numerous published studies we cite found that non-lethal methods to protect non-native cattle and sheep from native carnivores are more efficacious and cost effective than the constant slaughter of wildlife that is ubiquitously employed—even on federally protected species.

The USDA's methodology involves collecting data from a few mostly unverified sources, which the USDA then extrapolated statewide—in each state—without calculating standard errors or using models to test relationships among various mortality factors. This contravenes the scientific method and results in exaggerated livestock losses attributed to native carnivores and dogs. Unfortunately, this misinformation informs public policies that harms native carnivores, including countless administrative, legislative and congressional attacks on cougars, grizzly bears, wolves and the Endangered Species Act. At times, the USDA's predation numbers were thousands times greater than other governmental bodies.

