



Livestock predation by gray wolves nearly nil

In March of 2019, the Humane Society of the United States produced three ground-breaking reports that transform how we should think about living with native carnivores like wolves, grizzly bears, and cougars. In the United States, data show that native carnivores kill few cattle and sheep.

The Humane Society of the United States recently analyzed the most recent data published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on livestock predation. Government data show that wolves have a negligible effect on the livestock industry. **Across the country, farmers and ranchers lose nine times more cattle and sheep to maladies such as health, weather, birthing problems, and theft than to all predators combined. Gray wolves cause just over one percent of cattle and sheep losses in the states where they live.** Maladies caused over 90 percent of unwanted livestock losses.

What's more, the data contributed by USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) shows exaggerated losses many times greater than data collected by states, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and even other USDA branches. The USDA-APHIS's methodology involved collecting data from a few,

mostly unverified sources, which the USDA then extrapolated statewide. This resulted in greatly exaggerated livestock losses unfairly attributed to native carnivores, helping to fuel countless legislative and regulatory attacks on wolves, grizzly bears, and the Endangered Species Act by Congress and the current Administration.

One of the most commonly cited reasons for killing wolves is the misguided notion that doing so will protect livestock. However, numerous scientific studies have contradicted the efficacy of lethal predator control programs to remedy conflicts between wolves and livestock. These studies show that indiscriminately killing wolves can lead to greater livestock losses by disrupting stable family structures. The best remedies for protecting cattle, sheep, and other domestic animals are non-lethal measures. The USDA data show few livestock producers use non-lethal deterrents (e.g. just 10 percent of Idaho

Livestock deaths attributed to wolves, FWS* vs. USDA** figures				
State	Cattle		Sheep	
	FWS	USDA	FWS	USDA
Idaho	35	1,347	125	277
Montana	41	906	21	115
Wyoming	75	581	62	61
Oregon	3	1,415	10	0
Washington	7	110	0	136
Total	161	4,359	218	589

*FWS: Data year 2015 for both cattle and sheep (verified losses)

**USDA: Data year 2015 for cattle and 2014 for sheep (unverified losses)

cattle ranchers used at least one form of non-lethal deterrence).

Livestock Losses in the Western Great Lakes

In Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, the USDA attributed 3,879 cattle and sheep deaths to wolves from an inventory of 8.7 million. In other words, they claimed that wolves killed just 4 of every 10,000 cattle and sheep.

Furthermore, wolves were allegedly responsible for less than one percent of unwanted cattle and sheep losses (losses outside of intentional slaughter for market), whereas maladies accounted for more than 96 percent of losses.

However, the USDA-APHIS failed to use *verified* livestock loss data—that is, they largely relied on producers to tell them how their domestic animals died without confirming it. Therefore, these numbers are likely inflated or misidentified. For example, in 2015 in Minnesota—the same year that the USDA-APHIS attributed 2,104 cattle and 39 sheep losses to wolves in the state—USDA-Wildlife Services verified only 92 complaints involving domestic

animals. Of those 92 verified complaints, USDA-Wildlife Services reported that just 96 calves/cattle and sheep were killed—22 times fewer than the 2,104 claimed by unverified data from USDA-APHIS. Despite so few losses, 213 wolves were killed by Wildlife Services that same year.

Livestock Losses in the Northern Rocky Mountains

In the Northern Rocky Mountains states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, the USDA attributed 3,287 cattle and sheep deaths to wolves—just 0.03 percent of the 10.1 million total inventory. Of the total unwanted losses experienced by producers, the USDA attributed just a hair over one percent to wolves (1.16 percent). In comparison, over 86 percent of unwanted losses were attributed to maladies like disease and birthing problems. A whopping 16.5 times more cattle and sheep were killed by just respiratory health issues than by wolves.

Upon examination of *verified* losses reported by the FWS, the number of cattle and sheep deaths attributed to wolves dropped

significantly. The verified losses that the FWS provided for Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming in 2015 are nearly 19 times smaller for wolf-cattle losses than the USDA numbers: 151 (FWS) vs 2,834 (USDA). And the FWS's 2015 verified sheep losses are over 2 times smaller: 208 (FWS) vs 453 (USDA). Yet, agents and trophy hunters killed at least 620 wolves in these 3 states in 2015.

Livestock Losses in the Pacific Northwest

In the Pacific Northwest states of Oregon and Washington, the USDA claimed that wolves killed 1,661 sheep and cattle from an inventory of 3.5 million, or 0.05 percent. Further, the USDA attributed just 1.33 percent of unwanted livestock losses to wolves). In comparison, nearly 88 of every 100 unwanted losses were from maladies.

Yet again, the unverified USDA number of losses attributed to wolves dwarfs the verified livestock loss data reported by the FWS, compromising the scientific integrity of the data and inflating biased retaliatory action. The same year that the USDA claimed that wolves killed 1,415 cattle in Oregon, the FWS verified just 3 such losses. Taken together, the USDA's figures for Oregon and Washington were 83 times higher than the FWS's numbers.

Conclusion

While fears about livestock losses are often used as justification for killing America's iconic wolves, the evidence above shows that such alarm is unjustified. The best available science shows that killing wolves may exacerbate the few problems that do occur. It is time to stop lethal predator control and trophy hunting of wolves under the guise of livestock protection.

See all our livestock losses reports here: humanesociety.org/all-our-fights/banning-trophy-hunting.