



On a recent elk hunting trip, a Wyoming hunter came across the above scene where three wolves had pulled down a domestic cow. Despite the noise of the ATV's, the wolves tried to re-engage the cattle a second time only a few hundred yards away.

compensation fund when wolves were first released, and while that program was a masterful public relations gambit, it was also a scientific fraud because ranchers were never compensated for their true losses or costs. Even state-managed livestock depredation programs are little more than window dressing. First, there is the problem of finding wolf-killed livestock. In an Idaho study, only one in eight calves killed by wolves was actually found by the rancher. Then, even if you do find a dead animal, there is the additional problem of verifying whether that head of livestock was killed by wolves, or by something else. It is critical to bear in mind that most compensation programs will only reimburse livestock producers for what are termed "verified kills".

Just because you find one or more wolves feeding on a dead cow does not prove that the wolves did the killing. The cow could have been struck by lightning or died of disease and the wolves just happened along, and fed upon the already dead animal. Moreover, what if a large wolf pack made a kill and then ate the entire animal? Without most of the carcass intact, there is absolutely no way to prove the animal was actually killed by wolves. In reality, and depending on the area, less than 10% of actual wolf kills are ever verified as such by the

appropriate state or federal agency. And again, without verification there is generally no compensation. This, though, is not the worst of it.

Most cow-calf operators keep very detailed records on the production of their cattle herds. Calf weight gain is critical because cattle usually are sold by the pound, not by the individual animal. In the west, calves are sold by the pound to feedlots where the animals are fattened prior to slaughter and sale to the public. Since cattle behave similar to deer and

elk, it should come as no surprise that wolf-stressed domestic livestock fail to gain weight. Losses of 100 pounds or more per calf have been reported. At a dollar per pound, that is a loss of \$10,000 per 100 calves, or \$50,000 per year if a rancher normally markets 500 calves.

In an Oregon study, where both cattle and wolves wore GPS radio-collars that recorded an animal's location every 15 minutes, a rancher was having problems with wolves killing his calves. To eliminate that predation loss, the rancher was told to hire a rider to tend the cattle each and every day. Daytime calf losses did decline, but the wolves simply became nocturnal, and switched to killing calves at night. Interestingly, when you play back both the GPS wolf location data and the GPS cattle data on your computer, you can actually watch the wolves chase the cattle all the live-long night! Like deer and elk, cattle will avoid the best feeding areas when wolves are present. Is it any wonder then that calves fail to gain weight? In addition, the mother cows also lose condition due to constant wolf harassment.

Which brings us to the problem of open cows—that is cows which fail to produce a calf. Again, most ranchers keep very detailed records on calf production



Ranchers have employed riders to tend cattle on the range, which decreased daytime loss. Wolves simply switched to hunting at night, where the GPS data from the collared wolves showed continual harassment throughout the night.