

Working Wild Challenge Policy Recommendations

Introduction

Working lands stitch together the patchwork of land ownership that creates the character of the American West - open space, valued by both people and wildlife. Many rural communities have relied on an economy of agriculture for generations. Wildlife require vast open space agriculture provides for seasonal migrations or less frequent movements that maintain gene flow between otherwise separate populations. In some cases, the presence of wildlife threatens the economic viability of the very working lands on which they depend by making the margins even more slim and the variability inherent within agriculture even greater. An alternative to agriculture, the development of private working lands motivated by the desire to see open vistas out every window threatens to forever alter the character of the American West - the open space and the wildlife that depend on it.

Here we seek to share ideas to support the economic viability of these wild working lands that provide habitat and livelihoods for many. As wolves spread across the Northern Rockies the three S's - shoot, shovel and shut up - were shouted or whispered widely. Now 25 years after wolves were first reintroduced into Yellowstone Park, the conversation has changed. With 25 years of adaptation and experience, stewards of working wild landscapes agree the four C's - conflict prevention, control, compensation, and collaboration - contain the solutions that allow both people and wildlife to thrive.

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Conflict Prevention

Durable sources of funding for conflict prevention are needed to allow producers to implement these non-lethal tools within an adaptive framework. It can take years to tailor a range riding program to a specific ranch or community, develop a carcass removal and composting program, or build a team of guard dogs to protect livestock from wolves. Consistent funding from year-to-year is required to give producers the stability needed to invest in these tools, and this additional cost should not be theirs given the widespread public support for the return of large carnivores to western landscapes.

- ★ Increase dedicated capacity within the US Fish & Wildlife Service, USDA-Wildlife Services, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and state wildlife agencies to initiate and support proactive, voluntary conservation efforts.
 - If an agency requires a conflict reduction practice, agency personnel should be trained to implement the practice.
- ★ Prioritize research to identify effective implementation of conflict reduction practices.
- ★ Expand the capacity of landowners to implement cost-efficient and potentially effective conflict reduction practices integrated into holistic ranch management plans that allow for operational efficiency.
 - Increase access to technical and financial assistance for agricultural producers living and working with wildlife.

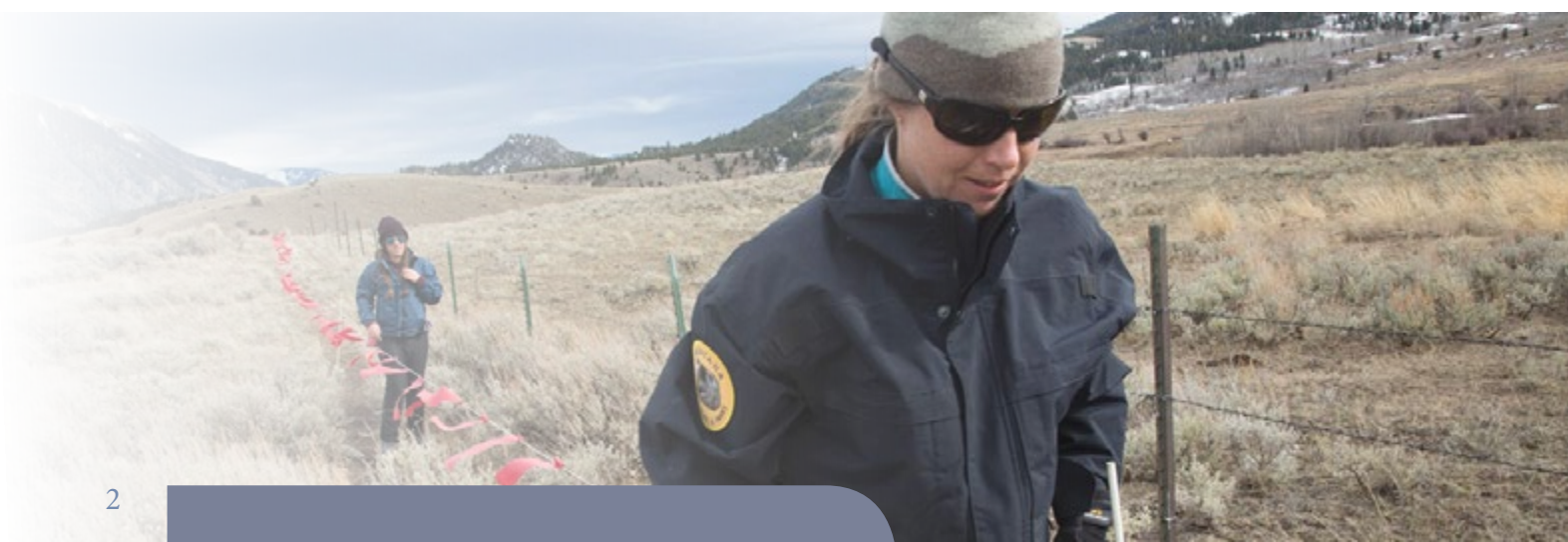
- Develop conservation practices under Farm Bill programs to fund landowners implementing voluntary conflict reduction measures.
- ★ Increase flexibility in grazing management, including on federally administered lands, to reduce potential for conflict through adaptive management.
 - Allow grazing permits to be modified with CEs where previous NEPA has been determined adequate to allow adaptive management to be implemented in a timely manner.
- ★ Conflict reduction practices should be encouraged and funded independently from depredation management and compensation. Conflict reduction funding should be provided in the spirit of partnership, both to encourage landowners to begin testing and implementing successful practices (implementation assistance), as well as rewarding those who have successfully done so (maintenance assistance). Conflict reduction is a constantly changing process, one requiring constant attention, adaptation and funding assistance.

Compensation

Wildlife is a public resource. The American public, as a whole, values the presence of diverse wildlife across the West, including large carnivores. We recommend funding sources for carnivore compensation reflect the fact that these species are a public resource.

- ★ Support for stewards of working wild landscapes must be multi-faceted. In addition to compensation for losses by large carnivores and assistance with implementation of conflict reduction practices, agricultural producers should be compensated for the economic costs of providing wildlife habitat on their working lands.
 - Develop habitat leasing structure that applies across public and private lands to acknowledge and support those who voluntarily provide and manage for wildlife habitat, open space, food and fiber and other services. Create a structure that does not inflate land values but provides income to sustain working lands experiencing conflicts with wildlife and encourage new agrarians to continue in agriculture.
 - Support the development of depredation compensation programs that use multipliers recognizing that multipliers will vary based on the depredating species and landscape specific needs (e.g. pasture size and cover), but are needed to compensate for missing livestock not found for depredation investigations and indirect losses (e.g. decreased conception rates and rate of weight gain) caused by large carnivores sharing landscapes with livestock.
 - Increase funding and training for depredation investigators, recognizing that expanding large carnivore populations results in increased need for resources to respond to depredations.
 - Apply the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) consistently across the West to compensate for missing livestock. Consider working with USDA-Wildlife Services for 3rd party verification of missing livestock.
- ★ Work to strengthen markets for sustainably produced forest and range products to maintain the economic viability of biodiverse working lands. Ensure consumers understand this supports those who voluntarily provide and manage for wildlife habitat and open space.
- ★ Recognize there is a social cost to living with large predators. Being a good steward of the land includes being a good shepherd to livestock and maintaining a safe family environment. The constant vigilance necessary can exact a toll, and should be considered as part of the costs of providing wildlife habitat.

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Control

Lethal control remains a highly controversial topic but is a critical tool in managing large carnivores on working landscapes. Allowing depredations to continue can spread what is often a learned behavior in one animal amongst many.

- ★ Identify and remove individual animals causing chronic depredations through agency wildlife managers.
- ★ Utilize USDA-Wildlife Services and state wildlife agencies to manage large carnivore depredations on livestock. State wildlife agencies' missions are to conserve and manage wildlife. USDA-Wildlife Services' is to provide Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts to allow people and wildlife to coexist. Conflicts of interest in large carnivore depredation management can be avoided by joint efforts and investigations between these specific state and federal agencies.
- ★ Streamline communication between agencies responding to and making decisions around depredations to ensure management responses are timely.
- ★ Develop innovative technologies to identify specific depredating individuals to expand management options.

Collaboration

Engage landowners early in the process and in a meaningful manner when developing predator and wildlife policies and land management plans.

- ★ Provide agency employees with training on landowner outreach and engagement to allow greater understanding of day-to-day ranch management.
- ★ Improve institutional frameworks, funding and staffing to promote interagency cooperation, communication and coordination and to increase awareness of resources available and partnership capabilities.
 - Create resource coordinator positions at USDA Service Centers in Western states who will work across agencies and provide on the ground support and technical assistance to landowners, farmers and ranchers.
 - Support local, community-based resource coordinators in areas with the greatest need for conflict reduction tools and financial assistance.
- ★ Ensure interagency cooperation across state lines is coordinated, recognizing that agricultural producers operate and wildlife move across state lines. In the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, this could be accomplished with a wildlife management working group.
- ★ Expand partnership-oriented staff positions working across federal agencies that bring together multiple stakeholders, technical assistance and funding sources.
- ★ Support community-based organizations to increase understanding of and adaptability to wildlife concerns.
- ★ Include ranchers/landowners as research partners when developing research projects designed to better understand and prevent conflict.

Background on the development of these recommendations

WLA hosts twice monthly practitioners calls where ranchers talk with ranchers. While these calls began in March 2020 as a discussion of effective implementation of conflict reduction practices, they turned towards depredation reporting and compensation in September as part of a collaborative research project between WLA and Colorado State University. The group continued policy related discussion in October and November resulting in these recommendations.

