

# BUILDING TRUST



+ A GUIDE FOR AGENCIES  
WORKING WITH PRODUCERS  
TO REDUCE WILDLIFE CONFLICTS



Wildlife conflict on working lands can strain relationships between livestock producers and wildlife agencies, making trust crucial for conflict resolution and effective resource management. These recommendations, based on input from producers, agency staff, and experts across the western U.S., aim to help agencies and other groups build trust with producers while managing wildlife conflict. Recommendations are organized for agency field staff and leadership, but are relevant across roles. To access the full guide, scan the QR code at the end of this document or click on this link:

[wla.social/building-trust](https://wla.social/building-trust)

*“Oftentimes, I’ll be out doing something, and I’ll stop and talk to them [producers] for an hour. ... It’s just getting stuff out there so you’re not hiding things, and we’ll just deal with this stuff together. That’s where I see it being really positive.”*

– Wolf biologist

## Field Staff Recommendations

### Engage in honest communication and actions

- Have difficult conversations.
- Fulfill commitments and only make realistic promises.
- Be consistent in agency responses and action.
- Follow standards expected of producers.

### Increase responsiveness and accessibility

- Respond to conflicts quickly.
- Provide accessible contact information.

### Share information openly

- Use multiple communication platforms.
- Supply timely and consistent updates.
- Follow clear decision-making guidelines.
- Proactively share information.

### Value and integrate local knowledge

- Understand the context and constraints of producers.
- Engage producers in two-way discussions.
- Incorporate producer insights into agency data.
- Collaborate with producers.

### Build connection through meaningful interactions

- Connect with producers before conflicts arise.
- Show up in person.
- Check in with informal visits.
- Engage with the local community.

### Practice conflict communication skills

- Listen actively.
- Approach conflict with empathy.
- Be direct about your values and intentions.
- Acknowledge and be accountable for mistakes.
- Admit when you don't have all the answers.
- Check your blind spots.

*“An agency got in touch with me to go to a range riding workshop. I told them, ‘We’re interested, but we don’t want to be talked at. We want to have a conversation about what we already do and not be talked at like we don’t know anything. We have the experience on the ground. We have folks riding.’”*

– Rancher in Colorado

*“Treat us earnestly and [do] not have those automatic responses of, ‘Oh no, that’s not what you saw,’ or, ‘No, according to our population information, there couldn’t be anything there.’ Even if they don’t believe us, take us seriously and know that we’re not lying or that we’re not out just looking for attention. ... We wouldn’t be reaching out to them if we didn’t have an encounter. ... Don’t chastise us when our observation doesn’t match their data.”*

– Tribal rancher from AZ



## Agency Leadership Recommendations

### Embed relationship-building into agency practices

- Incorporate relationship-building into staff evaluations.
- Integrate producer relationships into conflict mitigation success metrics.
- Plan in-person meetings between agency leadership and producers.
- Hire or partner with people with relationship-building skills.
- Improve inter- and intra-agency communication and coordination.

### Foster understanding and respect for producers

- Promote a public service mindset.
- Increase awareness of economic realities.
- Provide learning opportunities for working lands conservation.
- Recognize producers' contributions to wildlife conservation.

### Support field staff in building relationships with producers

- Trust and empower field staff working with producers.
- Provide staff training.
- Establish support channels within the agency.
- Strengthen staff capacity and well-being.

### Increase accountability through evaluations

- Establish pathways for producer input.
- Partner with third-party mediators.
- Develop assessments for evaluating producer relationships.

*"I found about four agency folks that would ask me questions about what was going on. The rest of them just knew what was going on because they'd read the book. They didn't bother to come out and interview people. They didn't bother to get details specific to the area - they had a lot of stuff to change about me."*

– Rancher in Idaho





*“Agencies need to work well with each other to show their commitment to ranchers and farmers. We do not want to get caught in the bickering between agencies arguing which agency should be stepping up to help with conflict prevention/reduction/ implementation and support.”*

– Montana rancher

## Evaluation Questions

These questions can be asked within the agency, by external partner organizations, and producers:

- How are staff engaging in honest communication and actions with producers?
- How responsive and accessible are staff to producers?
- How are staff sharing information with producers?
- How are staff valuing and integrating local knowledge?
- How are staff building meaningful connections with producers?
- How are staff practicing conflict communication skills?
- How is agency leadership embedding relationship-building into agency practices?
- How is agency leadership fostering respect and understanding for producers?
- How is agency leadership supporting field staff working with producers?
- How is agency leadership evaluating agency-producer relationships?



Read the full text and find additional resources at

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