

ALBERTA SHEEP

Predator Control

Introduction

It is essential for all producers to manage and protect their flocks. Sheep are docile animals and are unable to defend themselves from predators. Loss from predation could be economically disastrous to those producers who do not utilize proper predation management techniques. Proper predation management is essential to good flock management. Daily monitoring and proactive predation management methods are the best ways to minimize the vulnerability of your flock. Alberta sheep producers should be aware of the following predators: feral and domestic dogs, coyotes, wolves, bears, cougars and eagles.

Determining a possible predator attack:

- frantic mother looking for her young
- nervous livestock
- injured livestock
- holes dug under fence
- hair on fence
- wool pulls on sheep (usually shoulders, side, and rump)

The Two Most Common Predators in Alberta

Most predators attack in the evening and early morning. However, producers must realize that an attack may occur at any time of the day.

Domestic Dogs

- kill for fun – often at night, can be near buildings and under conditions of livestock confinement
- often attack in packs of two or more dogs
- dogs often fatigue their victims by chasing them
- often kill sheep by packing into corners where they are crushed and suffocated
- do not feed on the animal
- mutilate the sheep by biting anywhere on the body
- attack sheep of any age

Coyotes

- Alberta's primary natural predator
- coyotes are quick and competent killers that attack the throat region
- usually hunt alone except when training pups
- target the most vulnerable – small, sick, old or injured sheep
- eat their kill (begin in flank area)



- usually pull out stomach and intestines to feed on the kidney, liver and lungs
- usually kill only one sheep per attack
- will return regularly once predation begins

Other Predators

Wolves

- bite hind quarter, throat and head
- attacks are more common in forested pastures
- often kill adult sheep
- consume or drag prey away

Bears

- bite head neck, and hind area
- claw marks on the back
- kill many sheep in one attack
- consume or drag prey away
- Grizzlies often cover their victims after feeding, Black bears rarely do

Cougars

- bite on the upper section of the neck and the rear of the skull
- claw marks on the back and neck
- drag their prey away prior to feeding
- guard carcass remains, be careful when approaching kill area

Eagles (Bald and Golden):

- prey on new born lambs during migration (early spring/late fall)
- scavenge on livestock carcasses
- eagles are protected under the Wildlife Act
- Producers should contact their local Natural Resources Service districts office if an eagle was responsible for a case of livestock predation.

Predation Control Methods

There is no one solution that will eliminate predation. However, there are many good methods that will reduce predator problems. It is important that producers adopt predator management practices that meet their needs and create the best defense possible.

Electric Fencing

The most popular method of predation control is the use of electric fencing alone or with net-wire fencing. Attaching one electric wire on the outside of the fence, that is offset by 8 to 10 inches (20 to 25 cm) and 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm) off the ground, may work in your operation.

For more information contact Alberta Agriculture & Food to obtain a copy of *Electric Fences for Protecting Livestock from Predation* or the *Coyote Predation of Livestock Manual*.

Guardian Animals

Dogs, donkeys and llamas can all be considered for guardian animals. To train a good guard animal it is important that the animal bonds with the flock. This bond must begin at a young age for guardian animals in order to develop a keen guarding instinct.

Remove Dead Livestock

Predators will scavenge on carcasses, if they have the opportunity and may acquire the taste for the meat, which could lead to predation. Therefore, it is paramount that producers pick up and dispose of all deads and afterbirth. The best way to dispose of dead livestock is to burn it. However, if burying, the hole must be deep enough to prevent the carcass from being dug up.

Repellents and Frightening Devices

The use of various frightening devices may reduce predation for several days. These devices include propane exploders, sirens, distress calls, lights, scarecrows or even a radio. Producers must realize that predators become accustomed to these sights and sounds. Therefore, variation is vital to the success of this prevention method.

Predator Reduction

A proper predator management program aims to prevent the start of predation. However, if killing of livestock persists, termination of the predator may be the only other option.

Producers are able to hunt and shoot coyotes or permit others to do so, on their own land. To trap or snare predators a farmer must obtain a resident trapper's license to trap even on their own land. Poison is lethal to all animals. Therefore, some producers may want to consider alternate methods.

When assessing your predator situation try to remember that there is no miracle method. Combining two or three methods may improve a problem with predators, however there is no guarantee for permanent elimination of predation.

Ask for Assistance by contacting your local County/Municipal Agriculture Fieldperson.

For more information phone the Alberta Sheep & Wool Commission at 403-948-8533.