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Perspectives on Wolf Depredation Reporting and Compensation

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This research serves as part of the Center for Collaborative Conservation policy brief series *Policy and Practice for Wolf Reintroduction in Colorado*. You can find the whole series [here](#).

Research Focus

To inform the development of an equitable compensation program for wolf depredation in Colorado, we conducted 12 focus groups and collected 165 survey responses from livestock producers across the West, including Colorado stakeholders to gauge expectations. Our goals were to identify what factors drive compensation use and the associated reporting process, and to understand what aspects of existing compensation can be improved to better serve landowners.

Key Findings

While the majority of respondents had reported depredations to the required personnel, about half of all producers had chosen not to report a depredation at least once. The most commonly stated reasons for reporting included to be eligible for compensation, to maintain an accurate record of wolf conflict, and to have wolves removed and/or management taken. The most commonly stated reasons for not reporting included discomfort with government oversight and regulation, concern about unfair confirmations made by agency personnel, and that **the time investment associated with the reporting process (detection and confirmation) is not worth the available compensation.**

Respondents who believed their neighbors and/or community members were also reporting depredations were more likely to intend to report future depredation.

However, those who had experienced wolf depredation in the past were less likely to intend to report compared to those who had not yet experienced depredation.

Of the producers who had received compensation for depredation in the past, satisfaction with programs was extremely mixed. The most commonly stated reasons for choosing not to apply for compensation included dissatisfaction with the confirmation process (too much validation and paperwork), a lack of trust and satisfaction with state government employees, and a belief that current compensation programs were not the right solution to wolf-livestock conflict.



Cattle grazing on a public allotment with wolf and grizzly bear activity

Over half of respondents who had received compensation for past depredation believed the compensation available to them was not representative of their actual losses to wolves, and that compensation for indirect losses is needed. Most respondents also thought a multiplier should be used to account for depredated animals never detected for confirmation.

Factors Driving Intent to Apply for Compensation:

Trust in State Government: the greater a respondent's concern with state involvement in their operations, the more likely they were to intend to apply for compensation.

Community Perceptions: the greater number of neighbors and/or community members a respondent believed were applying for compensation, the more likely they were to intend to apply.

State of Residence: if a respondent was from Colorado or New Mexico, the more likely they were to intend to apply.

Attitude: the more negative a respondent's attitude toward being compensated, the less likely they were to intend to apply.

Financial Risk: the more financially vulnerable a respondent felt they would be without compensation, the more likely they were to intend.

Implications for Colorado Policy and Management

Livestock producers want depredation support programs that provide diverse payment and engagement options, while including compensation for direct losses. Colorado producers were interested in both access to a cost-share for nonlethal financial and technical support and a habitat lease option, but only when paired with compensation for direct losses. Across all states, programs without payments for direct losses were extremely unpopular.

Programs with diverse payment and engagement options can provide flexibility for the context-specific needs of each operation, while also helping to cover additional conflict-related costs. 80% of respondents believed indirect losses were as, or more financially damaging than depredation. Although research on the impacts of indirect losses remains limited, programs that provide alternative means of support could greatly benefit operations where, for example, terrain makes detecting carcasses extremely difficult. This flexibility may also help to support landowner autonomy and ownership over wolf-related management needs.

CPW District Wildlife Managers should encourage peer-to-peer interaction to increase depredation reporting and compensation use. If effective and sustainable wolf management policies rely primarily on the accuracy of depredation data, CPW should focus efforts on promoting reporting among livestock producers. Since the reporting and compensation processes are connected, improving producer experience with both processes may help to promote reporting while also helping producers remain economically viable in the face of wolf and grizzly bear conflict.

More Information

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