



# Wolves and Livestock

*Lessons learned from the Northern Rockies*

Gray wolves were reintroduced to the Northern Rocky Mountains in 1995. Lessons learned in the intervening 25 years can help inform the current wolf reintroduction conversation in Colorado.

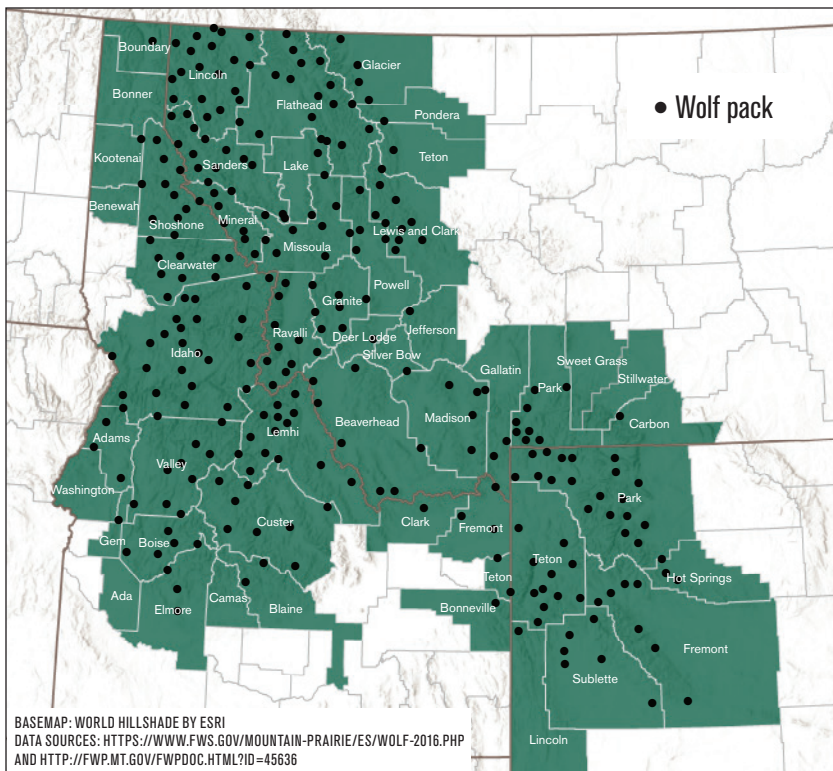
## Livestock losses

One issue of concern to many people is the potential impact of wolves on livestock. Data from the three Northern Rockies states—Idaho, Montana and Wyoming—show what we might expect in Colorado.

Within Northern Rockies wolf-occupied counties in 2015—the last year interagency data on Northern Rockies wolf recovery was published—**0.01% of cattle (148 cattle) were lost to wolves<sup>1</sup>** (see Figures 1 and 2). In comparison, that same year, 8.37% (141,000 cattle) were lost to all causes.<sup>2</sup>

Cattle in wolf-occupied counties in the Northern Rockies total approximately 1,600,000.<sup>3</sup> The Western Slope of Colorado, which contains Colorado’s suitable wolf habitat, has approximately 400,000 cattle.<sup>4</sup> If annual percentage losses of cattle to wolves are similar to what has occurred in the Northern Rockies states (about 0.01%), **Colorado could expect average losses of about 40 cattle per year** once wolves fully occupy suitable habitat, although numbers will vary by year.

**Figure 1. 2015 Wolf Packs by County**  
(Idaho, Montana and Wyoming)



**Figure 2. Cattle Losses to Wolves**

(Counties in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming with both wolves and cattle, 2015)

Loss to wolves  
**.01%**

Cattle population

Wolf population: 1,904  
Cattle population: 1,602,100  
Confirmed cattle losses: 148

DATA: [HTTPS://QUICKSTATS.NASS.USDA.GOV](https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov); [HTTPS://WWW.FWS.GOV/MOUNTAIN-PRAIRIE/ES/SPECIES/MAMMALS/WOLF/2016/FINAL\\_NRM%20SUMMARY%20-%202015.PDF](https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/es/species/mammals/wolf/2016/final_nrm%20summary%20-%202015.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Sheep data is not available by county, so a similar analysis limited to wolf-occupied counties is not possible.

<sup>2</sup> Statewide losses for Idaho/Montana/Wyoming; county losses are not available.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Statistics Service (<https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



**Installing fladry, a rope barrier affixed with red flags that flap in the breeze and scare wolves away.**

### Compensation

While the vast majority of ranchers in wolf-occupied territory never experience direct losses of livestock to wolves, losses do occur. To partially mitigate this impact, compensation funds are available from government and private sources to reimburse reported losses.

- From 1987 to 2009, Defenders of Wildlife managed a private compensation fund in the western U.S. that paid livestock owners 100% market value for confirmed losses and 50% for “probable” losses.
- In 2010, Congress began providing funding to states and tribes for wolf compensation through the Wolf Livestock Demonstration Project (aka “Tester Funds”).

Montana provides one example of a compensation program that could be replicated in Colorado. In 2007, the Montana legislature created the Montana Livestock Loss Board to respond to livestock losses to wolves. Defenders of Wildlife contributed \$100,000 to assist with the transition of compensation to the state. Federal Tester funds have contributed funding to Montana for wolf compensation since 2010.

### Conflict Prevention

While compensation is an important part of wolf recovery, the implementation of conflict prevention measures can reduce losses and is key to long term success. These preventive approaches focus on sustainable

and comprehensive strategies including:

- prescribed grazing
- rekindling the herd instinct
- husbandry practices

Physical tools to support these approaches include:

- fladry
- fox lights
- livestock guardian dogs

Additional proactive measures include range riding, carcass removal, and night penning.

Montana also provides an example of a conflict prevention program that could be replicated in Colorado. Federal Tester funds have contributed funding to the Montana Livestock Loss Board for preventive measures since 2010. Multiple nonprofit organizations, including Defenders of Wildlife as well as livestock owners, contribute funding and resources to preventive measures in Montana.

For more information on conflict prevention tools and techniques, visit these online guides:

- [https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/livestock\\_and\\_wolves.pdf](https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/livestock_and_wolves.pdf)
- <https://westernlandowners.org/publication/reducing-conflict-with-grizzly-bears-wolves-and-elk/>



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