

Sun Ranch 2008 Livestock-Predator Coexistence Plan

Drafted by Sun Ranch Agriculture, Sun Ranch Institute, and community partners

01 May 2008

Sun Ranch Group, Sun Ranch Institute, and their partners have convened a collaborative process and developed a new program to promote coexistence of livestock and predators in the Madison Valley of Montana. The partners recognize that earlier efforts could be improved and that careful planning, a thoughtful and comprehensive process, and interaction between Sun Ranch staff and community members will lead to the best outcomes for wolves, cattle, and people.

With our partners we have decided that success will be measured in our adherence to the plan, the quality of our decision-making, and the extent of our communication. Events we cannot predict, may not fully understand, and that may be beyond our control can powerfully affect the outcomes of our program. We all acknowledge that a successful plan and season may include some conflict, including the death of cattle and wolves; nevertheless, we will strive to minimize negative impact on animals and people. In the long run, we aim to reduce the frequency and severity of livestock-predator conflicts. All of the partners enter into this season in good faith, willing to work diligently toward success, and ready to offer support when appropriate.

The plan has two key parts: information management and on-the-ground management, which are themselves divided into several subsections. Please see the **Figure 1** for a graphical presentation of this plan's structure.

On the Ground Management includes three different phases or types of activities:

- Proactive deterrence (the “green phase”)
- Reactive hazing (the “yellow phase”)
- Lethal removal (the “red phase”)

We believe that we have the most control and room for creativity in the green phase, where coexistence efforts appear to be most sustainable ecologically, socially, and economically. These activities aim to prevent livestock-predator conflicts. Developing the most effective green-phase activities may take years, as Sun Ranch adapts its grazing regimes and the cattle it stocks in order to minimize potential conflicts.

Sun Ranch Staff would invoke activities in the yellow phase when wolves are sighted in proximity to cattle or people. Actions in this category largely consist of increased human vigilance to detect predators' presence followed by less-than-lethal hazing to condition predators to avoid livestock and people. While important and necessary, such techniques are not as sustainable financially and socially as are those used in the green phase. Accordingly, we try to prevent having to move into this set of techniques.

The red phase invokes lethal removal of predators. We hope to avoid this phase at all. In the worst-case scenario, we hope to minimize the frequency and duration of management activities of this sort. We will enter the red phase only under rule 10(j) (or the Montana defense of property statute, depending on regulatory jurisdiction), or at the recommendation of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. The ranch will endeavor to keep its partners informed ahead of any decisions involving lethal control.

The ranch crew may invoke tools from all three phases at once (i.e., movement toward the right of the diagram does not preclude activities in management phases to the left of the diagram).

Figure 2 presents a detailed explanation of on-the-ground management activities.

Information Management and communication are also vital to this coexistence plan. We approach this endeavor knowing that we need our partners' collaboration. Furthermore, we intend to share our work with others who might benefit from our experiences. Managing information has two key components:

- Data gathering
- Information reporting

Our staff and partners will help collect and maintain stores of information about livestock and predator behavior and other data. Additionally, we will document our own actions and experiments to understand how those actions influence animal behavior.

We intend to share this information with our partners as the season progresses. Eventually, we hope to make the collected information available to researchers studying livestock-predator coexistence and to others who may work toward collaborative programs on other ranches.

The Sun Ranch Group hopes to contribute to the body of peer-reviewed science surrounding livestock-predator coexistence by providing data, facilitating controlled experiments, or through other means. We acknowledge that such studies may take years to plan and will be difficult to execute. SRI and SRG will continue dialogues with scientists and academics in order to help them make valuable contributions to coexistence knowledge and practice.

Figure 3 further explains information management activities.

Figure 1: Plan Structure

Sun Ranch Predator Coexistence Plan Structure

Proposed by Sun Ranch Agriculture and Sun Ranch Institute, 15 January 2008

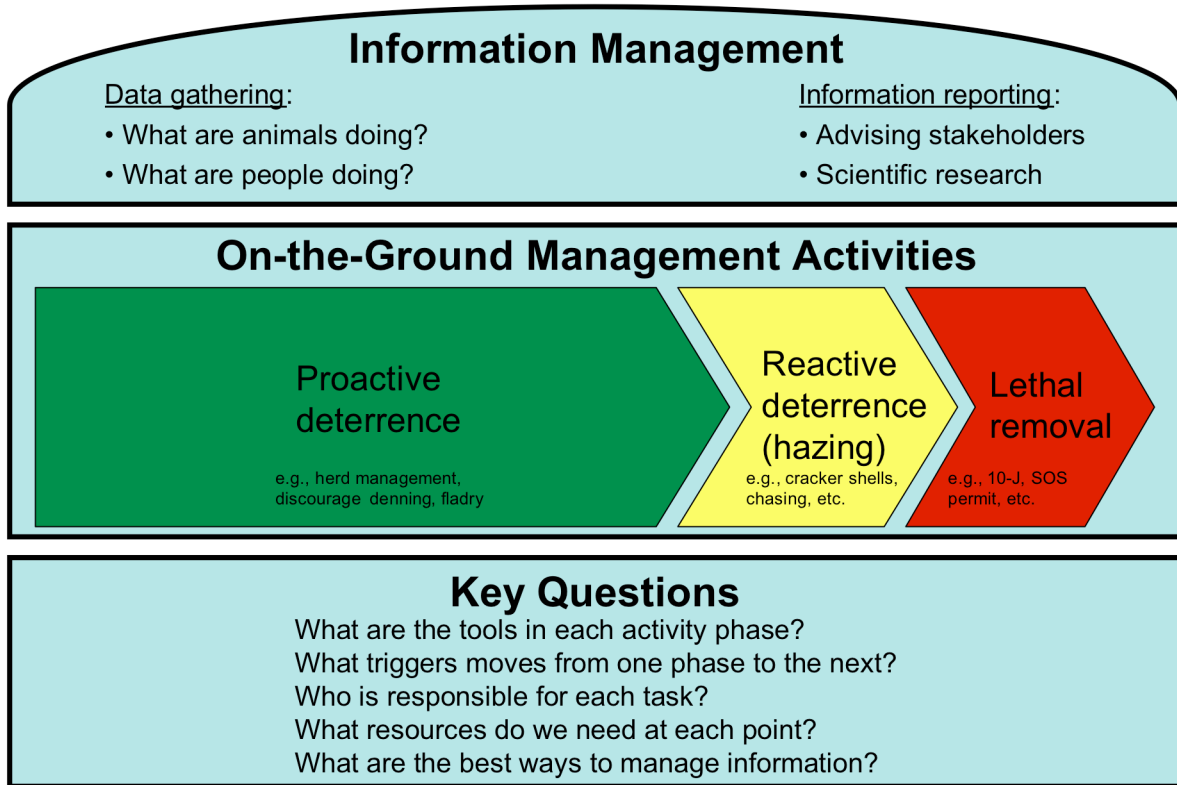


Figure 2: On-the-Ground Management Details

Proactive Deterrence
<i>Actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scouting: Search for den and rendezvous sites, count wolves, and monitor movements. • Den disturbance: If the den is on private land we may disturb it prior to denning in an attempt to move wolves to a different area. We expect <u>not</u> to disturb the den for fear of forcing wolves closer to cattle or losing the knowledge of where predators are. Nevertheless, if consultation with our partners suggests that it is the best option, we may disturb the den if the activity is sanctioned by FWP and the agency can reasonably predict the outcome of the activity. • Fladry: Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) will coordinate volunteers to move fladry from pasture to pasture. Keystone Conservation and Sun Ranch Institute will attempt to develop and initially deploy new types of fladry that are cost-effective and easier to use. The ranch and partners will maintain fladry weekly. • Herd and pasture management: Sun Ranch staff will manage cattle herds to keep them out of vulnerable areas when possible. The staff will also check herds several times a week for health, wolf attacks/depredations, and stress. The staff will use low-stress herding techniques.
<i>Responsibilities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranch staff will provide spring scouting, den disturbance, and herd management. • GYC, Keystone, SRI, and others to be determined will provide fladry and maintenance of fladry. • FWP will provide consulting and legal input.
Reactive Deterrence
<i>Actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazing: The ranch staff will chase and harass wolves in attempt to condition a fear of humans. Hazing will be done with rubber bullets and cracker shots as well as pursuit on horse or vehicle. In some cases, we may use live rounds (bullets will not be aimed at animals) to scare wolves.
<i>Responsibilities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ranch staff will haze wolves. • FWP will train ranch staff in less-than-lethal techniques if necessary and appropriate.
Lethal Removal
<i>Actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10(j): Lethal control under rule 10(j) or under the Montana defense of property statute will be a personal choice for each member of the ranch staff. If the individual sees, as described by law, that wolves are attacking cattle he can take action under the law. Individuals will be held responsible for applying the rule incorrectly. Members of the ranch staff are encouraged to document all situations surrounding any such action. • Shoot-on-Site (SOS): The ranch staff will not request or use SOS permits unless Wildlife Services is unable to respond immediately such that wolf attacks, depredation, or stress continues in the cattle. When Wildlife Services representatives are on the ranch to address depredation, they may use the tools and methods at the agency's discretion to do its job. The Sun Ranch and the Sun Ranch Group will minimize activities that would hinder Wildlife Services from completing its job.
<i>Responsibilities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sun Ranch staff will communicate with FWP and Wildlife Services about attacks/depredation and other pertinent information regarding wolves and livestock. • FWP will invoke agency control and issue SOS permits as it determines necessary. • Wildlife Services will investigate livestock losses and attacks and will carry out lethal control directives.

Figure 3: Information Management

Data Gathering
<i>Actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain detailed records and database of all predator sightings, sign, and encounters. • Maintain detailed records of livestock performance, movements, and other pertinent details. • Identify and document all management actions and experiments pertaining to coexistence activities. • Ensure that all records are backed up and clear. • Prepare an end-of-season report summarizing and pulling together all of the above information
<i>Responsibilities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sun Ranch staff will gather and maintain all information. • SRI will advise on best practices for data management.
Information Reporting
<i>Actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SRG, Sun Ranch staff, and SRI will facilitate site visits and tours when practical to help others understand the ongoing coexistence program. • Sun Ranch staff will maintain verbal communication with FWP, Wildlife Services, Keystone Conservation, GYC, SRI, and other relevant partners and advisors. • Sun Ranch staff will issue a weekly report on the coexistence program. The report will be a voice message posted in a secure voice mailbox. Partners will share a passcode allowing them to hear the updated message, and we will aim to send an e-mail indicating when updates have been posted. • Sun Ranch Group and SRI will remain open to inquiries from our partners. • We all agree to address concerns immediately and to share information that will help address potential misunderstandings. • SRG will prepare a report at the end of the season and distribute it to partners. • All partners will work to disseminate the results of our work and practices as appropriate and as sanctioned by SRG. • SRG will consult with its partners before making public, formal announcements about the program or plan. Acknowledging that it will be impossible to do so always, SRG will also attempt to advise its partners before relevant public relations events occur. • SRG and SRI will seek partners' ideas when planning subsequent coexistence programs.
<i>Responsibilities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranch staff and SRG will maintain the voice mailbox system. • Ranch staff and SRI will update voice message system regularly and as needed. • Ranch staff and SRI will develop and disseminate reports with help from partners as appropriate. • All partners will pledge to uphold best practices in communication.