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## **\*\*PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF RANGE RIDER PROGRAMS OPERATING TO MITIGATE WOLF-LIVESTOCK CONFLICTS IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES**

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As gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) populations have expanded in the western United States, wolf depredations on domestic livestock have increased. Concomitantly, wildlife managers are seeking management tools that could mitigate wolf-livestock conflicts and enhance stakeholder support for conservation efforts. Range Rider Programs (RRPs) have emerged as a non-lethal management strategy that advocates the use of increased human surveillance of livestock herds in area occupied by wolves to reduce wolf-livestock conflicts. However, little information is available about the scope of contemporary NRM RRP or participant perceptions about the potential for the programs to mitigate these conflicts. We conducted semi-structured phone and personal interviews with 51 participants from 17 Range Rider Programs (RRPs) in Montana, Oregon, and Washington to develop a typology of NRM RRP and assess participant perceptions of current programs. Although the RRP we studied varied in context, program focus and scale, they shared similar organizational components that included: a sponsor, collaboration among several organizations, a funding mechanism, a structure that included a supervisor, the landowner(s) and the range rider(s), and a mechanism for stakeholder feedback. We identified three unique RRP versions based on the primary focus of the programs: 1) livestock monitoring, 2) wolf surveillance and 3) livestock herding. While participants identified a number of benefits (e.g. increased information on wolf activity, extra herd supervision, rapid carcass identification), they also identified challenges which affected program sustainability. Challenges pertaining to trust and open communication were inherent in several programs, however the lack of stable funding was viewed as a major threat to program sustainability. The final challenge to RRP sustainability was the largely unproven success of this strategy.