Livestock Management for Coexistence with Large Carnivores, Healthy Land And Productive Ranches: A Viewpoint

Matt Barnes, Rangeland Stewardship Program, Keystone Conservation, Bozeman, Montana 59715

The livestock – large carnivore coexistence field can be more effective by expanding from a direct focus on carnivores and predation-prevention tools to the context of livestock management and the broader social-ecological systems of ranches and rural communities. Ranchers may be able to apply many of the same approaches that work for rangeland health and livestock production to reduce conflicts with large carnivores. Generally, in the presence of their predators, wild grazing animals tend to form large, dense herds that then move around the landscape to seek fresh forage, avoid fouled areas, and escape predators. They also tend to have their young in short, synchronized birthing seasons (predator satiation). Grazing management involving high stocking density and frequent movement, such as rotational grazing and herding with low-stress livestock handling, can improve rangeland health and livestock production, by managing the distribution of grazing across time, space, and plant species. Short calving seasons can increase livestock production and reduce labor inputs, especially when timed to coincide with peak availability of forage quality.

Livestock management, including grazing management and calving in short seasons that correspond with those of wild ungulates, may directly and synergistically reduce predation risk, while simultaneously establishing a management context in which other predation-prevention practices and tools can be used more effectively. Pilot projects on summer cattle range in western Montana involving increased stocking density through intensification of existing grazing rotations with herding suggest methods that can be used to improve grazing distribution and prevent depredations.