



Livestock Guard Dog Case Study

Cliff Caldwell,
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*This research was partially funded by the
National Sheep Industry Improvement Center.*

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Scenario

A ranch between Sterling City and Big Springs participated in the project. The ewe flock and their lambs are run on wheat fields in the winter and spring. Once the lambs are weaned, the ewes are turned out onto range. Predation has not been a major issue because ewes and lambs are condensed into smaller areas prior to weaning. However, adult sheep loss and young lamb loss prior to relocation to wheat field is a constant concern.

Overall Management Plan

Four bonded livestock guardian dogs (5R Stock Dogs, Billings MT) were placed with ~100 finewool ewes and their month-old lambs. The sheep and dogs were held in a water lot (5 acres) overnight and were released into wheat pasture the next morning. More ewes and lambs were brought to the wheat field over the next month. The sheep and dogs were checked multiples times per week. The four dogs were to remain with ewes and lambs in wheat field until the lambs were weaned; then the ewes were to be split into different groups, each with an assigned guard dog, and sent to rangelands.



General Observations

The dogs stayed in the pasture with the sheep for the majority of the time. They were relatively easy to catch in a pen. The dogs were most often seen with sheep. Just over two months into the project, the cooperators chose to end the project early due to unfavorable interactions with a neighbor's captive-raised deer and the livestock guard dogs.

Predation

No predation was reported. A dead coyote was found in the wheat field. The cause of death is unknown; however, it was suggested that the guardian dogs killed the coyote.

Problems

Two of the guard dogs got into porcupines and had to be taken to a veterinarian to have the quills removed. The livestock guardian dogs were reported to have barked at neighbors, which raised concerns. More notably, the livestock guardian dogs were reported to have killed a neighbor's deer. The deer were raised in captivity, and then released on the neighbor's pasture. The dogs reportedly chased the deer into a high fence, which fatally injured the deer. Wild deer were often seen in the wheat pasture with the sheep and dogs without any major incident. However, the liability concerns were too large for the cooperators to comfortably continue on the project. All four dogs were relocated to other cooperators within the project.

Lamb Crop

The project was ended too soon for any relevant data to be summarized.