

Verifying Livestock Conflicts A TIMELY PROCESS

Submitted by Cam Hill, Program Coordinator, Livestock Protection Program



Cam Hill

Last week I had a conversation with a rancher that had discovered, over the course of the summer, several calves out on range that had been hamstrung, but not killed, by wolves. It wasn't until he found a carcass that he contacted me and we began to sort out the evidence that would eventually lead to compensation and mitigation efforts.



When conducting mitigation activities on crown land, our permit requires signage on all reasonable approaches within one kilometer of sets.



A thorough verification involves looking for clues found at and near the site. In this case wolf hair was found on the fence.



Tracks can be a significant clue to piecing together the sequence of events leading up to an attack or to help prove harassment.

The reporting of conflicts as quickly as possible after discovery, is an important aspect of the Livestock Protection Program. Prompt reporting puts in to motion efforts to verify while the evidence is fresh and can lead to a quick mitigation response. Mitigation, where appropriate, helps ensure that future losses and injuries will be kept to a minimum. Program funding for loss compensation is provided, in part, by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. One of their requirements for covering losses to canids was to ensure that some sort of mitigation process was in place thus hopefully reducing future loss payouts. Exceptions, of course, are always taken into consideration as there will be times where other factors will come into play and mitigation success versus risk will have to be carefully measured. Such exceptions

would include the presence of livestock guardian dogs or cattle dogs where the risk of their accidental capture or injury may be too great. Cattle too, may interfere with sets resulting in possible injury and untold frustration for Wildlife Specialists who have to contend with the bovine vandals. Fall, in particular, is a difficult time for Wildlife Specialists to conduct mitigation efforts. Hunting season is underway in most areas of the province and it is that time of year when human activity on crown range is at its peak. Our permit requires that Wildlife Specialists, conducting mitigation activities on crown land, post signs on all reasonable approaches within one kilometer of sets. These signs are intended to “alert” the public that trapping, for the purpose of wildlife control, is occurring in the area. Their presence, however has

proven to be a double edged sword. They tend to peak the curiosity of some who will seek out sets and our specialists often have to contend with the loss of the traps and at times any catches. On the other hand forest companies, hunters, hikers and local First Nations have all in the past, contacted the phone number provided on the sign and have been given information about mitigation in the area. Carefully articulated our response has been generally well received and land users have been able to adjust their activities accordingly. Bears too are a consideration when weighing out the benefits versus risk of mitigation efforts. Fall is also that time of year when bears are making every effort to put on weight for their long winter nap. Their noses are working overtime and although wolves

may be the cause of a cattle loss, any carcass remains may quickly be checked out. Wildlife Specialists will typically not set up directly on bait however the risk of bears inadvertently running amuck with sets is often reason enough for efforts to be discontinued or delayed. Reducing incidental catches of non-target species is a major goal of the program.

Prompt reporting of course also allows verifiers to attend an area and gather evidence of conflicts while that evidence is still fresh. That can make the difference between a compensation pay out and one that is denied. Too often I hear from producers who are confident that a found carcass has been killed by a predator however the best evidence has now been lost to scavengers. A couple eagles and a dozen ravens can quickly turn a straight forward verification into a challenging process. Binge eating by bears can clean up an adult cow carcass overnight leaving verifiers scratching their heads. No question the bears were there but did they kill it or simply scavenge what they found?

Although we generally like to see evidence on the carcass itself, often the scene of the crime can be pieced together by tracks, blood trails and drag marks. These too can quickly be erased in short order by unfavourable weather conditions.

Tarping a carcass is always a good idea

when found if a verification can't be done within a few hours of discovery. Moving a carcass away from the scene and back to the barn or into a stock trailer is not ideal but is also an option. Verifiers like to visit the kill site to look for clues. Sometimes the evidence is very subtle and can easily be missed to either confirm or rule out the involvement of predators. Last spring we were puzzled by a heavily woolled up ram (yes we do sheep ... but not goats, pigs or horses) that was previously observed to be very healthy but was then found dead the following morning. There was evidence of predator perimortem feeding but a definitive cause of death was troubling the verifier. One photo showed a shallow depression only a few feet behind the carcass. Further discussion and investigation revealed that the rotund ram had bedded in the depression. Struggling to get up resulted in him rolling further onto his back. With feet in the air he likely bloated and died. Scavenging coyotes had eventually tugged him from his earth bed. I don't have much experience with sheep but I have seen this happen several times with cows. Positional bloating which occurs when cows, generally heavy in calf, bed in a shallow depression and while struggling to get up eventually invert themselves and with four feet in the air the esophagus quickly gets blocked with fluid and gas cannot escape.

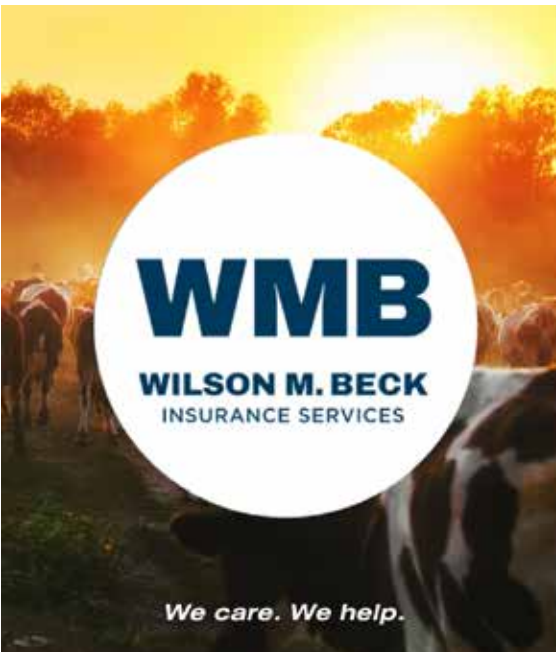
A goal of the Livestock Protection Program is to conduct verifications within 36 hours of discovery. Sooner, of course, is better. The program tracks the success of this target. Since April first of this year we have met the 36 hour goal with 89% of the files that we have acted upon. The challenging ones are those found on crown range by individuals who are not certified verifiers thus necessitating a return trip with qualified help. It's always a good idea to take plenty of photos, whether you have received the verification training or not. Many times good producer photos taken at discovery have greatly helped with the process of determining cause of death.

If you are struggling, either as a certified verifier or as a producer with a suspected predator conflict, on how best to proceed please feel free to reach out to me either via email LPP@cattlemen.bc.ca or through the hotline number provided below.

Further information about the Livestock Protection Program can be found at www.cattlemen.bc.ca/lpp.

For incidents of cattle or sheep losses, injury or harassment where wolves, coyotes or birds are suspected please call our toll free number 1-844-852-5788.

For incidents involving other wildlife such as bear and cougar please contact the COS RAPP line at 1-877-952-7277.



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