

Photo Documenting THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Submitted by Cam Hill, Program Coordinator, Livestock Protection Program • Photos from LPP File



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A picture is worth 1000 words. Well, maybe not always. Post-processing technology has allowed the possibility of drastically altering images. A photo that may seem quite spectacular may in fact be touched up, photo shopped or borrowed from another source. On the other hand, some photo editing may add clarity to what is being depicted. Most of us ranchers however, are light years away from figuring out that technology. It seems that taking a decent photo and figuring out how to forward it by text or email pretty much hits the upper limits of our capabilities.

Good photos are a key component of the Livestock Protection Program and may make the difference between compensation payments being paid to a producer or the claim being denied. They may also be instrumental in kick starting mitigation which will hopefully lead to some predator conflict relief. But it's not only capturing the correct photo that is important, it also must work its way through the LPP system to the nice person who writes the compensation check. My role, as LPP coordinator, is to coordinate the flow of evidence, offer clarification or interpretation of results and then disseminate recommendations forward. I also approve mitigation when appropriate. Photos provide the support for decisions made on whether or not to mitigate and help to justify compensation. Challenges on decisions made on either do occur, and it's the photographic evidence that is most relied on to support the outcomes.

The verification and compensation application process involves photo documentation to support all claims with a few rare exceptions. Most verifiers do a pretty good job of that but there is always room for improvement. When gathering photo documentation there are several things to consider.

Kill Verifications

These are the most complex of verifications and will require the most photos.

- The first photo we like to see one depicting where and how the dead animal was found. Ideally the photo should not be taken from too close up. It should encompass the whole animal and also take in a bit of the background.
- Any visible trauma should be photographed before skinning. If canine bites are evident a photo should be taken showing their spread width. This is not critical at this stage as more accurate measurements can generally be found on the underside of the hide. A caliper is the best tool of choice for taking these measurements. A tape measure is also good or even the ruler scribed on your Leatherman Tool. What is not a good tool ... is a cigarette lighter (oddly, the most commonly used).
- Skinning the carcass is generally an essential part of the verification process. Skinning and looking at the underside of the hide as well as the muscle and underlying tissue is the most conclusive way to determine whether wounds were made perimortem (at the time of death) or post mortem (after death).

As verifiers we know that if the heart is beating and blood is flowing when trauma occurs then bruising will result. Feeding that occurs after death (scavenging) will not show the same dark coloration of muscle and internal hide tissue that perimortem trauma would. Complete skinning of a carcass may be necessary as it may divulge not necessarily what the animal died from but what it didn't. Several photos may be required after skinning and this is where measuring any canine bite spreads is helpful, particularly if the offending predator type is yet unknown.

- Feeding patterns should also be noted with one or two photographs.
- The surrounding area should be carefully inspected for predator tracks, hair and/or scat. Also drag marks, blood trails and damage to fences, etc. can all provide valuable clues. Photograph and submit any evidence found.
- Photo of ear tag.

Injury Verifications

These are generally pretty straight forward. Obviously no skinning is involved and often the injured animal is found in a location other than where the attack occurred so locating surrounding evidence may be less critical.

- Photo of wounds as found.
- Shaving during the doctoring process may add clarity.
- Photo of ear tag. This is important in the event the animal later dies or is euthanized. At that time a follow up photo of the dead animal (include ear tag in photo) helps to link the two for compensation payment.

Harassment Verifications

Approving mitigation based on a harassment claim can be challenging. Our operating permit does allow for mitigation when cattle or sheep are harassed by wolves or coyotes but it also specifically indicates (six times in fact) that the mere presence of predators does not justify mitigation. The program's intent is to not move into the realm of proactive predator removal. Reactively removing predators known to cause losses has kept the program defensible. Understanding what is harassment and when is that line crossed from predators being in the immediate area to when their presence is menacing and will likely result in physical harm if not corrected. Capturing evidence to support harassment may involve a bit of leg work. Some supportive photos may include:

- Photos of canid tracks, scat or hair clumps. Often cattle hair can be found in scat.
- Tracks of livestock that might indicate a chase.
- Photos of livestock being bunched against physical barriers such as cattle guards or fences.
- Damage to fences, etc.
- Obviously none of these alone can prove harassment so additional observations included in the Verification and Compensation Application are of value. A quick email or text (statement) from someone who observed a chase is great and is not uncommon during hunting season when others are out on range.

Now that photos have been taken they need to be forwarded myself, the Program Coordinator. The preferred method is to forward them by email. You can email them direct from your smart phone however the best method is to download them to your home PC or laptop and create a file. That way you have them stored for future reference and where they are easily retrievable. One of the most frustrating things I deal with in reviewing photos is trying to figure out what part of the animal is being shown and what exactly is the photo taker trying to indicate. Often it is obvious but photos taken too close up with no body part reference need some type of explanation. Downloading the photo to your PC or laptop allows for the photo to be renamed and appropriately sized for sending. Some verifiers will actually organize the photos in some sort



A photo like this is helpful and shows trauma however an explanation as to what part of the body the photo is of would be helpful. Alternatively, backing off another foot or so might reveal more while still showing the trauma. Knowing what part of the body targeted greatly helps in determining the predator type involved.



Another way to measure and add context to a photo.



Several verifiers have either purchased or made up crime scene evidence markers. When adding several such photos to an email the can easily reference the numbers in the cover email or on the Verification and Compensation Application form. Calipers are a great tool to have in your verification kit.

of program. When I do verifications I like to use PowerPoint, but mostly because that's the only program I can figure out. There are lots of options out there. PowerPoint allows plenty of room for written context to be added to each photo. I then PDF the document and forward it in a nice package. Several verifiers around the province have adopted this same system and it sure makes my work easier, both to view and understand and also to store and email to others involved in the approval process. Another simple option is to rename the photo, e.g. Left hip, note bruising on underside of hide. Photos can also be texted direct to me. This method involves a little more work from my end in order for them to be stored electronically then emailed on to round out the approval process. Photo size needs to be considered before emailing. Most modern digital cameras or smart phones take pictures at a much higher resolution then can easily be sent through email. High resolution photos take longer to send and to open at the other end. High resolution photos also limit the number of photos that can be attached to a single email. There are many ways to reduce the size and giving advice on doing so is not something I am qualified to do. If emailing direct from a smart phone, without downloading first then it is best to send them mid-size (around 160 KB). Too small and they cannot be enlarged and any bigger and they are slower to send. If photos are not renamed or put in some type of program where a description can be added then an explanation should be accompanied either in the Verification and Compensation Report or in the body of the email.

A few other tips for making the photo taking process more seamless;

- If doing a kill verification where skinning is involved hand your phone/camera off to a helper.

You are likely wearing latex gloves and I find that the gloves insulate preventing a response from the touch screen. A helper is more effective then removing the gloves or touching the screen to your nose to activate the camera (hey, whatever works!).

- Review your photos before you dispose of the carcass. Things can go wrong and I have dealt with producers who have buried a carcass only after to find out the photos were too blurry to show detail.
- More is not always best. When I do a verification I generally take plenty of photos but when I get back to my computer I sort through them and forward only the most appropriate. I have received as many as 45 photos from a verifier on a single calf kill and that many just makes more work for both of us. A complicated verification may have as many as a dozen but seldom are more needed.
- Don't delay! Organize and forward the photo and the Verification and Compensation Application form as soon as you can while the details are still fresh on your camera and in your mind.

Too often I receive a file and view a few hastily taken photos that do not capture what is needed to prove predator involvement. Often I can see that the evidence is likely there, it just wasn't appropriately captured. Remember that compensation payments are based on photo evidence. Doing the best job possible will help ensure that compensation is appropriately paid.



underside before washed.

k9 marks

This Wildlife Specialist went the extra mile while verifying the scant remains of a long dead calf found by a rancher on Crown range. The dried up hide was taken home and soaked to better measure the canine bite spread. He later scraped off the dried tissue to reveal bruising around the bite holes. A wolf kill was proven, the rancher got compensated and the specialist removed two offending wolves.



An excerpt from a PowerPoint presented file.

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

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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