Notes from Small Group Conversations, Living with Wildlife While Managing Working Landscapes

December 2nd 2015

**Producer Perspective to Seek Sustainable Solutions  
  
Discussion leaders:**Devon Jones – Farm Bureau (TBD)  
The Magruder Family  
Dorothy and Paul Kong  
UCCE Advisor John Harper

GROUP A

* Main driver for new solutions?
  + No. of kills in flock
  + Minimize losses
  + Outlawed methods: traps (leg hold), chemicals, protection collar
* Who got involved
  + Rod Shippey
* If legality was not an issue what would you use (economics and ecological sensitivity?)
  + No poison
  + No chemicals without proven record of non contamination

Notes:   
How far do you go before you stop farming?  
Williamson Act is a good way to keep land in Ag. (especially rangeland)

GROUP B

* Elk in Mendocino Co. – how has that affected you in keeping other predators out?
  + Elk – some ranchers get from 5-150 per night on their property
  + Thinking about fencing as they tear down “normal” fencing
  + Elk compete with deer and are destructive with commercial activities
  + Have not modified predation practices due Elk
* Dogs – who can you call about dog problems?
  + Animal Control in Mendocino County
* How big is the problem with dogs?
  + Bad, in that cows/bulls are killed and maimed
  + Some marijuana growers and subdivisions make it worse
* What practices have you tried that did not work?
  + Guardian dogs are good, but can leave the flock and can get killed when straying from the flock either on road or by misunderstanding from neighbors.
* Emotional component to losing livestock
  + Hard work goes down the tubes.
  + “I’m sick and upset” when predation happens “they are our responsibility until they go to market”.

GROUP C

* Are you getting any help with the Elk?
  + Harvest 2 Elk – try for more this year (SHARE program)
* Are examples heard in main auditorium unique to you or general in nature?
  + Not unique, but most sheep ranchers have left due to depradation
  + Mobile electric fencing has helped with the coyote issues.

Note: Large ranches (sheep) are not the norm now because cost of predation mitigation is prohibitive

Note: Many producers couldn’t come today because it’s a busy time of year for sheep ranchers right now.

* What $ help is there for some of these issues?
  + NRCS
  + Williamson Act

**Integrated Management Tools and Future Opportunities  
  
Discussion leaders**Dr. Justin Brashares - UC Berkeley Associate Professor of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation  
Dr. Roger Baldwin - Cooperative Extension Specialist, Human Wildlife Conflict Resolution  
James Shular - North District Supervisor, USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services  
Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Pamela Flick – California Representative, Defenders of Wildlife

There was another woman who was a discussion leader and I feel terrible in that I do not remember her name

GROUP A

* How do tools/opportunities apply in suburban settings?
  + Dr. Breck’s research in Denver: Bean bag shells, hazing
  + Options for lethal methods for citizens may be limited (no firearms discharge)
  + Outreach and Education
    - Wildlife Watch program
    - Don’t feed wildlife (education doesn’t always work sometimes warnings/fines might be necessary)
  + Targeted removal: Confirmed by DNA
  + Small parcels and urban areas present challenges and tie hands.
  + Wildlife management has changed over time
  + Wildlife behaviors have also changed
  + Camera trap set in areas of heavy depredation
  + Suburban wildlife posing danger to kids
  + Presidio coyote biting dogs and aggressive behavior – this dog was identified and eliminated with no public outcry
  + Question hysteria surrounding wildlife conflicts in suburban areas?
  + Many (most) wildlife/human conflicts originate from human actions/unfamiliarity with living with wildlife
  + OUTREACH AND EDUCATION very important
    - Learn to live with wildlife but don’t let wildlife get used to living with us
    - Mixed messages regarding feeding wildlife; wildlife behaviors; etc
  + Removal of problem individuals as needed
  + Habitat modification (e.g. mow grass along trail) can help in some conflicts where predators ambush their prey
* Producers
  + Often don’t have staff or other resources that researchers have
  + Where do producers get their information from? Family, neighbors. Researchers are seen as “special interest” – investigation/exploration of research projects can be helpful/important.
  + Surveys are of interest to producers (Carrizo plain)
  + Important to have a few “lead the way” – word of mouth messengers matter.
  + Are snares/traps the best tool when manpower decreases? Not able to check traps means that animals may die a slow death. State law requires traps are checked every 24 hours.
  + General agreement that lethal control is sometimes needed.

GROUP B

* Do coyotes follow people/development in wild/urban interface?
  + Yes, suburban areas and rural areas and urban areas provide significant resources.
* Target problems individuals vs. populations?
  + H. Cooley paper re. pack disruption.
* Chemical vs. surgical sterilization
  + Neither have shown to be really effective at this point in time
  + Urban coyotes taking small pets, stray cats
* What percentage of coyote population are “target animals” or will eventually depredate?
  + It depends, variable. They are opportunistic depending on what resources are available
  + Coyote depredation of livestock is a learned behavior – pack dynamics and situational differences are couple of the many variables.
* What’s going on with the prey populations? Another key question to research
  + Native prey/ livestock
* What level of loss of livestock is acceptable?
  + Sheep producers plan on loss between 10-40% depending on the individual operation.
* What level of loss of predators is acceptable?
* What amount of non lethal methods attempted is required before lethal is allowed?
  + Compare efficiency of lethal v. individual methods in the same area

GROUP C

* Research on wildlife or environmental impacts/detrimental contamination done on 1080?
  + No secondary impacts, it is still used in Australia
  + Producers would like to use 1080 as a tool again
  + One producer told that sheep with 1080 collar no longer desirable/human safety issues?
  + Other toxicants being investigated but none that work as quickly or relatively humanely.
  + Potential option: regulated distribution?
  + Wildlife Services might be challenged by the administrative requirements/paperwork to issue 1080 collars.
  + Social tolerance for toxicants is declining in general
* If equally effective would producers choose lethal or non lethal?
  + Lethal if could target specific individuals
  + Costs and efforts aren’t equal
* Wildlife Services Specialists provide assistance that’s often critically needed due to lack of capacity
  + Without Wildlife Services, predator control will be put in the hands of producers with varying experience/skills of predator control – may backfire and be less humane to predators leading to increase in predators killed.
* Is sterilization a realistic option?
  + A chemical option “close” in terms of development, but implementation still a ways off
  + Oral ingestion mechanism being researched
  + Good for integrated management but not stand along cure all
* What is communicating/organizing force behind educating public (especially the urban population?) about importance of keeping ranching operational and not being converted to development or vineyards?
  + CA Farm Bureau, Cattleman’s association – declining membership numbers, consider rebranding “food and farm bureau” to gain buy in.
* Changes in public perception about hunting/ranching
  + Increase in the farm to fork movement
* Use of grazing to study succession (in oak woodlands)
* Is ranching sustainable if tools and use of Wildlife Services taken away?
* NGO/producer/University funded study of non lethal and lethal control tools (operated on a running ranch) using ‘real operating costs’ as a producer would..

**Understanding Operational Realities – local, state and federal connections**

**Discussion leaders:**

Scott Koller – California Department of Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Dennis Othmeyer – USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, State Director

**Q: Who does the property owner or rancher contact to receive assistance and service?**

Three agency paths and routes in each County to do this. And all three agencies are coordinated so once the property owner has contacted one the other two will be contacted as needed. The three are:

* California Department of Fish and Wildlife Biologist – This is the individual that makes the determination for issuing a depredation permit.
* USDA APHIS Wildlife Services or County Wildlife Specialist – These are the staff that are trained and assigned to provide predator control services.
* County Agricultural Department and Agricultural Commissioner Office – Typically the Wildlife Specialist is administered through the Ag. Department and in all cases the Ag. Department has contact information and directions for accessing services from all three agencies.

In the event that domestic or feral dogs are involved the County Animal Control unit will be the lead and should be contacted. The other three agencies USDA Wildlife Services, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and County Ag. Department are coordinated with County Animal Control.

**Q: What species are covered under and require a depredation permit?**

There are nine:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Bear | Deer | Mountain lion |
| Beaver | Elk | Turkey |
| Bobcat | Grey squirrel | Pig |

**Q: How is a permit issued?**

Issuing a permit requires “confirmation” of property damage including damage to livestock, structures, and natural resources.

It is important to protect and not disturb the damage scene. Don’t allow dogs and people to walk through and around it. This is important for many reasons related to determining what predator and vertebrate pest caused the damage. It also is important in the event that feral dogs were involved, allowing for legal action and potential restitution to be made from the dog owners.

Permits are not automatically issued and in some cases are denied. As part of making the determination and issuing or not issuing a permit, additional technical recommendations and suggestions are offered to encourage the use of other methods and practices to reduce property damage (fencing, herding, guard animals, etc.) and factors that may be compromising predators (trash left out, refrigerators on porches with open access).

**Q: If a predator is seen near livestock can the predator be dispatched?**

No. The predator must be “worrying” and in the act of preying upon livestock before it can be taken. In these cases, a depredation permit can be provided post dispatching of the predator.

**Q. What species receives the most calls for service?**

Wildlife service’s receives calls that are predominately related to coyote incidents. CDFW Biologist responds to requests for bear and pig related incidents. The addition of bobcats to the depredation permit process has increased the CDFW Biologist work load.

**Q. What is the status and potential of having the designation of pigs on the depredation permit changed because?**

It will require legislative changes. There also needs to be additional discussion to understand how the current depredation permit process and options are and are not addressing the damage caused by pigs and mitigating that damage.

**Q. Is there cost share and funding support for lethal and non-lethal control measurements?**

Both the CDFW Biologist and USDA or County Wildlife provides technical assistance and recommendations for the use of non-lethal methods. In addition, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service does have financial support for some types of fencing and other non-lethal methods.

General interest expressed to see increased financial support for all methods.

**Q. How is research and technical information shared and spread through the agencies and clientele?**

There is two-way communication for this. Through USDA APHIS Wildlife Services and its National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), quarterly updates are distributed to State Directors and then to the Wildlife Specialists. Similarly, the USDA Wildlife Specialist may face a specific species issue or an issue with a type of potential damage like airports that are not their expertise and they can go to the NWRC for technical information.

**Overall Evaluation of Success: Process, Results, Relationships**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What worked?** | **What could be improved?** |
| Small groups | Platform for active voice for other non-producers |
| Kim’s facilitation | Some aspects of talks a little redundant |
| Science presentations | Introductions in large group might have helped know who is who? |
| Lots of active listeners | Panel about goals of each group/vision |
| Respectful dialogue | Explicitly state common ground to allow for communication |
| Hearing diverse perspectives | Summarize three groups outcomes |
| Local and non-local (outside input) | Time of day/year for producers |
| Skilled facilitators | Bigger perspective of urban/rural land use effects of wildlife |
| Lunch |  |
| Common mission of livestock AND wildlife |  |
| No introductions in large group kept discussion less polarized |  |