



# THE SECRET PREDATORS

## Eagles kill hundreds of lambs each year but federal bureaucracy keeps ranchers from getting help

By JANAE SARGENT  
Capital Press

**A**LBANY, Ore. — Laura Wahl stands in the field with her lambs eight hours a day during peak lambing season to protect them.

The predators aren't coyotes or cougars; they are bald eagles.

Wahl runs Wahl Grazing, a sheep and goat operation, with her family near Albany, Ore. She estimates that she loses 300 lambs a year to eagle depredation — a loss of approximately \$37,500.

During lambing season, Wahl is used to seeing 20 eagles lining the perimeter of her pastures waiting for ewes to give birth to their lambs.

Because of a complex reporting system, few resources available to ranchers and the stigma surrounding complaints about the national bird, Wahl said her family doesn't have many options to protect their lambs.

"There's nothing we can really do about (eagles)," Wahl said. "All we can do is hope the eagles don't find the lambs."

Eagle depredation is a controversial and complicated issue for ranchers, ranching advocates and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which oversees protected species. Ranchers agree that eagles killing lambs is a big problem but they do not report the depredation out of a lack of faith in federal government services.

Peter Orwick, executive director of the American Sheep Industry Association, said avian raptors are a huge problem for producers and that eagles are a particularly tough problem because there are limited tools and resources to help sheep producers.

In addition to not reporting the depredation, many ranchers don't even want to talk about the issue out of fear of reprisal.

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Laura Wahl  
of Wahl Grazing

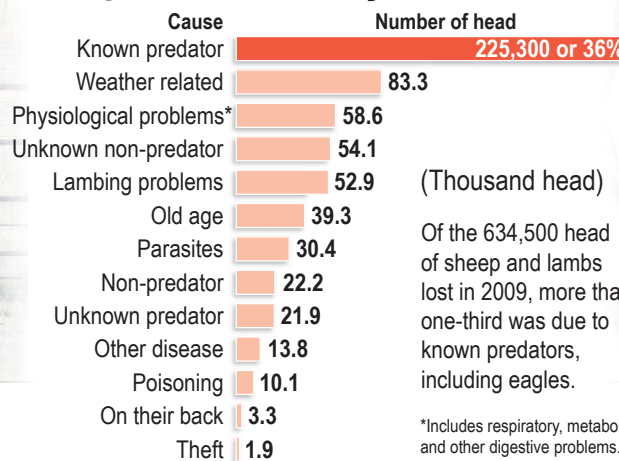


Laura Wahl, owner of Wahl Grazing, explains how eagles target the lambs in her pastures. When the fields face a perimeter of trees, she said eagles will perch in them.



Young feeder lambs stick near their mothers at Wahl Grazing.

### Sheep, lamb loss by cause, 2009



Source: USDA NASS

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press



Courtesy of Kathy Nowak, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

An American Bald Eagle is seen near La Grande, Ore.

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## Crop, pasture land prices increase in Northwest, California

### Investors still find value in tight ag real estate market

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

Agricultural land values have appreciated this year throughout the Northwest and California, bucking the national trend, according to a recent report by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Industry sources say the Aug. 5 report confirms an extremely tight regional supply of available farm land, even as low commodity prices are bringing down land values elsewhere.

The average value of U.S. crop land is \$4,090, down \$40 from the prior year, according to the report.

Idaho's average crop land value rose \$100, or 3.1 percent, to \$3,300. The average crop land price rose 2.1 percent in California, to \$10,910 per acre, 5 percent in Oregon, to \$2,730 per acre, and 4.9 percent in Washington, to \$2,760 per acre.

The trend was also consistent with pasture values, which held flat

nationally, averaging \$1,330 per acre. Pasture values are up 4 percent in Idaho, at \$1,300 per acre, flat in California at \$2,700 per acre, up 3 percent in Oregon, at \$680 per acre, and up 2.4 percent in Washington, at \$840 per acre.

University of Idaho Extension economist Ben Eborn said the report shows the first dip in national land



Grass seed is harvested in a Willamette Valley field. Agriculture land in the Pacific Northwest has risen in value this year, bucking the national trend.

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## EPA urged What's Upstream to be careful

### Agency reviewed website

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Environmental Protection Agency went over the What's Upstream website line-by-line last year, trying with mixed success to tone down the site's attacks on agriculture, according to newly released EPA records.

What's Upstream planners, led by the Swinomish Indian tribe in north Puget Sound, made some edits and thanked the EPA for its guidance.

But other suggestions were not adopted, and the tribe's environmental policy director, Larry Wasserman, resisted EPA's proposal to have the Washington Department of Ecology fact-check the website, according to an email from the EPA's Puget Sound

intergovernmental coordinator, Lisa Chang, to the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

Instead, the website was reviewed by EPA staff members, who were particularly concerned by unsupported claims about the extent of agriculture's contribution to water pollution and how surveys that purportedly showed strong public support for new regulations were presented.

"Since Larry was not open to having the appropriate ECY technical experts review this, I'm also including comments from our 303(d)/305(b) staff," wrote Chang, referring to sections of the Clean Water Act. "We want to emphasize the importance of ensuring a solid technical basis for assertions made in this website, including those relating to

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