

Idaho wolves kill six cows in one week

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Cascade, Idaho, rancher Phil Davis said wolves killed three of his cows in early August. Separately, three other cows were killed nearby.

"We lost three cows to wolves this last week, three days in a row," said Davis, who for decades has studied Idaho wolf issues and has been outspoken about wolves' impacts on livestock. The kills were Aug. 2-4 on Davis Cattle Co. property.

USDA Wildlife Services confirmed the three cows were killed by wolves, as well as three other cattle on property close by, Public Affairs Specialist Tanya Espinosa said. In necropsies to determine the cause of death, the agency found bite marks and associated hemorrhaging, she said.

"There was extensive trauma, particularly on the nose and face, on all three cattle, plus other places on the body," Davis said.

"We are on track this year to lose as many or more cattle than we ever have to depredation," he said Aug. 7, referring to Davis Cattle. "We are at nine right now. In the typical year it has been five to seven for the whole year."

He expects the Long Valley, a high-altitude stretch of meadows and mountains from Cascade north through McCall, to see more depredations than ever this year.

The Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission recently reported wolf-involved depredation cases set a record high for the fiscal year ended June 30 and are continuing at a strong pace.

Scott Lake, Western Watersheds Project Idaho director, said this reflects Wildlife



Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission

Katlin Caldwell, daughter of Davis Cattle Co. President Phil Davis, at work recently on the ranch near Cascade, Idaho.

Services' new method to confirm livestock deaths. "It is the reporting method and the Wildlife Services outreach efforts, encouraging ranchers to report more livestock deaths as possible depredations even where there is no outward sign of predation."

In Cascade, Davis runs his cattle on private, irrigated pasture, so livestock kills are in short grass and easier to find than they would be in trees or thick brush, Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission spokesman Steve Stuebner said. In remote trees and brush, it could take weeks or even months to find the carcass of a potentially wolf-killed animal, if it is found at all, he said.

In forest environments, "quite often, bears will consume the carcasses after they are killed by wolves and before ranchers or cowboys can find them," Davis said.

Canine marks on a hide confirm a wolf killed a cow or calf, he said.

"But sometimes there is so little trauma they are not confirmed," Davis said. "But I believe they died of myopathy."

Myopathy is muscle dysfunction or weakness. Da-

vis said it has been a factor in wolf-related deaths, even where on-carcass evidence is minimal or lacking, as the cow later falls some distance from the encounter site.

Lake said Western Watersheds disputes that field investigations can confirm deaths were caused by myopathy related to wolves.

Davis said he has asked Wildlife Services to "encourage their research arm to research myopathy so that confirmations can be more clinical" and less open to subjective interpretation.

Gordon Murdoch, University of Idaho associate professor of animal physiology, said reliably confirming myopathy as a factor in cattle deaths from wolf attacks will depend on test accuracy, the number of tests taken over time — and across different time periods and situations — and the ability to validate results.

Traumatic myopathy, as opposed to genetic or hereditary myopathy, results from physical injury or a change in pathology, he said. Low oxygen-carrying capacity, low hemoglobin levels or an illness are non-injury examples of traumatic myopathy.

"It's possible we could identify some animals that were captured and killed where one of the underlying causes is myopathy," Murdoch said. "I wouldn't want to say it wouldn't provide useful information, but it's not going to answer the whole story."

Livestock producers are losing fit, less-fit and very young animals to predation, he said.

"There might be some animals suffering from myopathy, and they would be susceptible to predation. But there are multiple factors," Murdoch said. Snow, fences and other barriers hinder even the fittest cattle, "so it's possible a very fit animal becomes prey to wolves that hunt in packs."

Exertion can be a factor. "If you are continually under threat, that can result in exhaustion and make you more susceptible," Murdoch said.

Whether myopathy or another condition exists, "anything that causes reduced capacity for muscle performance in the animal is going to hinder their ability to escape," he said. Myriad factors — such as other illnesses, excessive heat and reduced nutrition intake — "can participate in their susceptibility to predation."

"People don't realize what's happening," Davis said. "This management is not working. We can't continue to get more and more depredations."

Stuebner, of the Rangeland Resource Commission, said there have been many more wolf kills of livestock on private land than federal and state wildlife managers expected when they first placed wolves in central Idaho under Endangered Species Act provisions in 1995 and '96.



Justin Haug/WDFW

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife plans to add 94 acres to the Revere Wildlife Area in Whitman County. Cattle grazed on the land before it became a wildlife area.

Washington plans to add to wildlife area

Conservation group offers donation

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A wildlife area in Whitman County will grow under a proposal to be presented Friday to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission in Olympia.

The department staff is recommending the state accept a 94-acre donation from the conservation group Pheasants Forever to enlarge Fish and Wildlife's 2,291-acre Revere Wildlife Area 9 miles southeast of Lamont.

The land is valued at \$118,000 and will cost the state an estimated \$1,200 a year to maintain, according to a staff report. Pheasants

Forever will fund restoring a portion of the property to grasslands, according to the report.

The wildlife area was acquired in 1992 by Fish and Wildlife and the Army Corps of Engineers to make up for habitat lost to dams on the Snake River. Before that, the land was used for cattle grazing, according to the department's management plan.

Mule deer, coyotes, badgers, raptors and game birds such as pheasants and quail are on the land, according to the department. Sharp-tailed grouse have been documented nearby. The Revere Wildlife Area has 150 acres of irrigated farm land leased for hay production, according to the management plan.

Fish and Wildlife owns or manages approximately 1 million acres and is regularly acquiring more land.

Dairy farmers seek solution to 'desperate times'

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Dairy farmers from across the U.S. gathered in Albany, N.Y., recently to focus on a solution to staggeringly low milk prices and to rein in growing volatility.

The meeting was hosted by Agri-Mark, a Northeast dairy cooperative, and drew 300 people — dairy farmers, industry leaders, legislators and attorneys.

Mark McAfee, a board member of the California Dairy Campaign and California Farmers Union, was there to present CDC's proposal. He told Capital Press the fear and pain in the room was overwhelming.

"It's literally desperate times, and there doesn't appear to be any solutions on the table," he said.

Dairy farmers are under water with milk prices running \$3 to \$5 per hundredweight below the cost of production. Markets have been down for four years with three more forecast. Volatility has always been part of the system, but markets aren't recovering, he said.

About 500,000 U.S. dairies have gone out of business since 1970, and Wisconsin is currently losing two dairies a day, he said.

The problem is dairy producers aren't controlling the milk supply, he said. When prices are low, farmers pro-



Courtesy of Mark McAfee

Mark McAfee, left, board member of the California Dairy Campaign and California Farmers Union, with Nick Thurler, board member of Dairy Farmers of Ontario, during an industry meeting in Albany, N.Y., on Aug. 13.

duce more milk to increase their revenue. When prices are high, they produce more milk to make up for earlier losses, he said.

It's led to "cannibalism" in the industry, and it doesn't work. Even large and efficient dairies are no longer safe, he said.

CDC's Sustainable Milk Inventory System Act is a simple three-point plan aimed at solving the problem, and it's been vetted by board members of large co-ops. It

involves farmer-driven control of milk prices and milk supply by region and applying discipline to imports, he said.

The plan includes legislation to give USDA the authority to establish a national program of inventory management under the Federal Milk Marketing Order system.

It would be farmer-controlled, but USDA would provide the infrastructure to regulate it, he said.

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