Eagles kill hundreds of lambs each year but it goes unreported

Secret predators waiting for ewes to give birth

By JANAE SARGENT Capital Press

ALBANY — Laura Wahl stands in the pasture with her lambs eight hours a day during peak lambing season to protect

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. 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

In addition to not reporting the depredation, many ranchers don't even want to talk about the issue out of fear of reprisal. Three ranchers in the Willamette Valley acknowledged having serious problems with eagles but did not want to talk on the record or give their names.

Because ranchers don't report the depredation, representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Farm Service Agency and USDA Wildlife Services say they are unaware that eagles killing lambs are a

Lack of reporting

Emily Ruckert, a sheep rancher in Tangent, said most producers don't know how to report eagle depredation or that services or resources exist and don't have time to go through the reporting process so they choose to handle it themselves.

"I've been dealing with eagles my whole life," Ruckert said. "I've never even heard of reporting to Fish and Wildlife. There's really nothing we

Statistics are equally hard to find. A U.S. Department of Agriculture survey found that eagles killed 6,300 sheep and lambs in 2004, the last year those statistics were reported separately. The department stopped reporting specifically on eagle depredation after that but in 2009 reported that predators killed 247,200 sheep and lambs.

Dave Williams, Oregon state director of USDA Wildlife Services, said ranchers reported only three cases of eagle depredation on lambs to his agency between 2011 and 2015.

Representatives at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the agency has received no reports of eagle depredation in

According to the agency, "depredation" is damage to property or a threat to human health and safety caused by eagles.

Eagles are protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Act and the Migratory Bird Act, which means ranchers are not allowed to scare, harass or take eagles predating on their livestock without obtaining a permit from the Fish and Wildlife Service.

In addition to being the national bird, bald eagles were protected under the Endangered Species Act until 2007.

Williams said are doing well now and are not endangered but are still

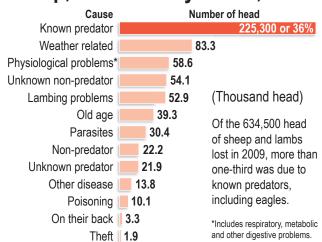
Rodger Ruckert, who is Emily Ruckert's father and partner in her sheep operation, said he has seen the number of eagles killing lambs drastically increase as their population has

"When I was a kid, if you saw one eagle it was quite a sight. Now there's easily 15 to 20 eagles around the pastures on any given day," Ruckert said.

Ruckert said most eagles don't migrate anymore and that he has several native immature eagles that eat his lamb crop all summer long.

percent of his flock of 300 lambs still up to the discretion of the hope or don't know any help

Sheep, lamb loss by cause, 2009



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press Source: USDA NASS

whether to grant a rancher a per-

examine the carcasses to look

for talon marks and determine

if the animal was killed by an

eagle or died of other causes and

was fed on by an eagle after its

Wildlife Services investigation

done can take up to two weeks,

which causes further problems

made and when an investigator

arrives to examine the carcass, it

is vulnerable to being eaten by

other predators and draws other

eagles and predators to the pas-

ture looking for more lambs to

Wildlife Service takes approx-

imately 30 to 90 days to pro-

cess completed permit applica-

tions once the investigation is

done and the depredation order

life Services, agreed it can be a

problem for ranchers and sug-

gested tarping carcasses to pro-

taking photos of the carcass and

keeping as much evidence as

tograph a carcass or protect it

is unrealistic because she runs

6,000 sheep on 15 pastures and

3,000 acres and can't keep track

mit application requires a \$100

fee in addition to documentation

and a depredation order from the

ers don't submit reports or eagle

permit applications because the

Wilford said he thinks ranch-

"Most ranchers either have

USDA Wildlife Services.

process is so difficult.

An eagle depredation per-

of each incident.

possible for the application.

They also recommended

Wahl said asking her to pho-

tect them from other animals.

Williams, of USDA Wild-

Holm said the Fish and

Between the time a report is

for ranchers

is declared.

Wilford said having a USDA

Williams said investigators

mit to haze the eagles.

devastating loss to him and his

"These producers basically have to watch their livestock getting eaten and they have to pay the bill," said Carter Wilford, a licensed falconer and ranching advocate from Utah.

Wahl explained that she has seen eagles grab small lambs and drop them from heights to kill them and has seen eagles pecking at the heads of larger lambs until they die.

Emily Ruckert said she came out to her pasture one day and saw two eagles on a monthold lamb pecking its brains out while it was still alive

The Fish and Wildlife Service offers permits and resources for ranchers experiencing eagle depredation but Jason Holm, the assistant regional director of external affairs, said the agency has not received any applications for an eagle depredation permit for agricultural loss in recent memory.

Because eagles are protected by federal laws, ranchers need permits to disturb bald or golden eagles that attack their livestock.

Hazing permits

Federal law prohibits wounding or killing eagles so the permits allow only hazing eagles, which means using nonlethal means to scare them away from livestock.

Wilford said accessing resources is bureaucratic and complicated and ranchers are frustrated by the federal government when it comes to eagle depredation.

To apply for a permit to haze eagles, ranchers need to have someone from USDA Wildlife Services inspect the lamb carcass and declare that the animal was killed because of depredation. After a depredation Ruckert said he has lost 10 is declared, Wilford said it is to eagle depredation, which is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service exists," Wilford said. **Permit experience**

Larry Ruckert, Emily Ruckert's uncle and owner of a separate small sheep operation, obtained an eagle depredation permit 15 years ago after seeing a large golden eagle kill a 20-pound lamb.

Ruckert said he had to call five different people to figure out how to apply for a permit. It allowed him to use firecracker shells to scare eagles away.

He said it gave him temporary relief but when he applied for a permit the next year, he never got a response and gave up.

Federal law and Fish and Wildlife Service regulations once allowed licensed falconers to trap immature golden eagles attacking livestock but the agency stopped the practice in 2009, said Sterling Brown, vice president of public policy for the Utah Farm Bureau Federation.

"The (USFWS) does not believe livestock losses are significant and has ceased falconers access to eagles," Brown said.

Holm said it is up to state governors to issue depredation orders and allow falconers to come into an area to trap predatory golden eagles and keep them for the sport of falconry. In his time at the Fish and Wildlife Service, Holm said he has only seen depredation orders used in Wyoming.

Holm said ranchers should first contact USDA Wildlife Services to assess if livestock damage was caused by eagles.

Compensation available

There is also a compensation program that was built into the 2014 Farm Bill that authorizes payments of up to 75 percent of the market value of livestock lost to federally protected animals for up to \$125,000, but few ranchers aware of it.

Taylor Murray, outreach specialist for the Oregon Farm Service Agency, said his office has never had an application for compensation for eagle depredation on lambs. He said that the Farm Service Livestock Disaster specialist has never heard of eagle depredation in Oregon.

Ranchers must apply at their local Farm Service Agency office and submit a "Notice of Loss' form within 30 days of the loss. Wahl said she had never heard of a compensation program but will apply now that she knows.

Wilford stressed that he believes in protecting eagles but that there is now enough eagle protection to warrant givgiven up on the issue, don't have ing faiconers access to predatory golden eagles and finding other resources for ranchers.

Falconers cannot trap bald eagles.

He said the system for obtaining permits and compensation needs to be simplified and that the Fish and Wildlife Service needs to look at how to prevent depredation rather than dealing with it after it happens.

Preventive measures

Ranchers have found some preventive measures to be helpful.

Wahl said the biggest help for her operation is to \bar{l} amb in a barn while the lambs are smallest and most vulnerable.

When a lamb is born in a pasture at Wahl Grazing, employees immediately transport it into a large barn, where it is protected from eagles.

But because of space constrictions, Wahl said she has to turn out the lambs after five days.

Wahl also has guard dogs but said they don't do much to protect lambs from eagles.

Emily Ruckert said she has protection llamas to deal with other predators but that she hasn't found them to be helpful against eagles. She also does lambing indoors when possible and stays with the lambs whenever they are outside.

Williams said the biggest thing that draws eagles to a pasture is carcasses. He said an eagle will first be drawn to a pasture to feed off a dead lamb and may then associate the pasture with easy food.

He suggested being vigilant in cleaning up and disposing of carcasses before eagles have a chance to associate lambs with

Wilford stressed the importance of ranchers reporting eagle depredation — even if they don't receive a permit or compensation. "It would be so helpful if

people reported more," said Wilford. "It would help to validate that there is a problem. The service is saying they don't get reports of depredation so they can't do anything."

Brown agreed that ranchers aren't reporting in any of the Western states but that the Utah Farm Bureau and its Western counterparts want to do more and assist ranchers.

'We want to protect eagles, migratory birds and predators but there also needs to be a program in place that is efficient enough to allow livestock producers to receive help when livestock is being depredated on," Brown said. "Ranchers aren't looking for handouts, just fair compensation for their



Evening listings MONDAY

MONE	PAY	EVENING				A - Charter Asto	ria/ Seaside - L - Ch	arter Long Beach					AUGUST 1
Α	L	6 РМ	6:30	7 РМ	7:30	8 рм	8:30	9 РМ	9:30	10 рм	10:30	11 PM	11:30
(2) KATU		KATU News at 6		Jeopardy!	Wheel of Fortune	Bachelor in Paradis	se (N)			Mistresses "The Ro	ot of All Evil" (N)	KATU News at 11	(:35) Jimmy Kimm
KOM		KOMO 4 News		Wheel of Fortune	Jeopardy!	Bachelor in Paradis	se (N)			Mistresses "The Ro	ot of All Evil" (N)	KOMO 4 News	(:35) Jimmy Kimm
KING		NBC Nightly News		KING 5 News	The Olympic Zone	Rio 2016 Summer		Springboard Qualifying					
6 KOIN		KOIN 6 News at 6			Ent. Tonight	Mom	2 Broke Girls			Scorpion "Djibouti		KOIN 6 News @ 11	(:35) S. Colbert
KIRO			CBS Evening News		Ent. Tonight	Mom	2 Broke Girls			Scorpion "Djibouti		KIRO News	(:35) S. Colbert
(B) KGW		KGW News at 6:00		Live at 7				Springboard Qualifyin					
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12) KPTV		6 O'Clock News		Family Feud				ination" Performances		10 O'Clock News			Loves Ray 1/3
(E) KPD		Mike & Molly Mike & Molly				FOX 12's 8 O'Clock News on PDX-TV FOX 12's 9 O'Clock News on PDX-TV			Law & Order: S.V.U. "Mercy"		Law & Order: S.V.L		
KCPC								ination" Performances		Q13 News at 10		Q13 News	Modern Family
20) TBS			American Dad				American Dad				Full Frontal	Conan	
KZJO				The Simpsons	The Simpsons	Modern Family	Modern Family	Q13 News at 9			Big Bang Theory	Friends	Friends
29) ESPN		(4:00) MLB Baseball (L)				SportsCenter				SportsCenter		SportsCenter	
30 ESPN		BattleFrog League		Streetball City Slam			ESPN FC	Baseball Tonight (L		Jalen & Jacoby (N)		NFL Live	
31) NICK			Henry Danger	Crashletes	The Thundermans					Full House	Full House	Friends	Friends
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34) FAM		(5:00) ★★★ The Blin						Guilt "The Crown vs	. Atwood" (N)	The Fosters		The 700 Club	
35) FMC										** Argo (2012, Thriller) Bryan Cranston, John Goodman, Ben Affleck.			
36) LIFE		★★ The Ex (2006, Comedy) Amanda Peet, Jason B							edy) Justin Timberlake, Patricia Clarkson, Mil		His Secret Family (2015, Drama) Haylie Du		Ouff.
33 ROO		Mariners Access MarinersPre-game								Post-game	MLB Baseball Seatt		
39) FS1						Fox Sports Live TMZ Sports (N)							TMZ Sports
43) SPIK		Scared Straight "Oa		Scared Straight "O		Beyond Scared Str		Scared Straight "Ri		Beyond Scared Str		Scared Straight "F	
44 COM			Futurama	Futurama	Futurama		South Park				South Park	The Daily Show (N)	
45) HIST		To Be Announced				American Pickers				American Pickers		(:05) American Pickers	
46) A&E						The First 48 "Mother of Two"				First 48 "Closing Time/ Family Matters"		(:05) First 48 "Million Dollar Question"	
TLC		Hoarding "Surviving on Trash"				Hoarding "Stop Touching My Stuff!"		Hoarding: Buried Alive "Tiny Monsters"		My Secret Job Fast N' Loud: Demolition Theater		Hoarding: Buried Alive "Tiny Monster	
48) DISC		Misfit Garage "Wre				Misfit Garage: Fire		Misfit Garage (N)				Misfit Garage	
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54) HGT\		Love It or List It				Tiny House, Big Tiny House, Big HouseHunters (N) HouseHunters (N)			House Hunters (N) House Hunters (N)				
56) FX		Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2 (Hotel Transylvania (2012, Animated) Kevin James, Andy Samberg, Adam San						evin James, Andy Samberg, Adam Sandler.	
57) CNN		Anderson Cooper 360				Anderson Cooper 360				The Eighties "Greed is Good"		CNN Newsroom	
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62 RFD		Rancher (N)	Red Steagall (N)	Horse Master	Inside Reining	Craig Cameron	Rural Eve. News	IVIII AMORICA "Clir	nato (ornoration"	American Rancher	I PAR STANGE	Product Showcase	

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