

Testimony in response to a solicitation of Input From Stakeholders Regarding the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA

Wednesday, June 2, 2010

One Washington Circle Hotel  
1 Washington Circle, NW., Washington, DC 20037

Testimony:

My name is Theodora Dowling. I'm here representing Public Lands council and National Cattlemen's Beef Association and submitting these comments on behalf of John Williams, an Oregon State University extension agent, and Liaison to the industry advisory Committee for ongoing research. I'd here with a topic you probably haven't heard about yet today, and that is the need for research on the ongoing conflict between livestock production and the growing wolf population reintroduced in the West. But first, a little more about who I'm representing.

The Public Lands Council (PLC) has represented livestock ranchers who use public lands since 1968, preserving the natural resources and unique heritage of the West. Public land ranchers own nearly 120 million acres of the most productive private land and manage vast areas of public land, accounting for critical wildlife habitat and the nation's natural resources. PLC works to maintain a stable business environment in which livestock producers can conserve the West and feed the nation and world.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) has represented America's cattle producers since 1898, preserving the heritage and strength of the industry through education and public policy. As the oldest and largest national association of cattle producers, NCBA and its affiliates represent about 140,000 producers, in every state, at all levels of production.

I am here today to testify about two areas listed as priorities for funding under the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008; that is, area (B) Animal health and production and animal products; and area (F) Agriculture economics and rural communities.

One of the most important issues of the western United States livestock industry is the rapid population growth and expanding area covered by the wolves introduced in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. These wolves are now expanding into Oregon Washington and northern Utah. In Idaho alone, confirmed wolf depredations on livestock increased nearly threefold between 2003 and 2009, from 140 to 385 in 2009. In that time, the wolf population has gone from a minimum of just under 400 to a minimum of 850.

The situation is this:

- Wolves are multiplying in areas with livestock
- Livestock losses are increasing

- Ranchers report that livestock death and production losses to wolves are getting worse
- Both loss of income and increased stress are occurring
- Ranchers need to have management techniques to minimize cattle and sheep losses
- Reliable information is necessary to formulate rational policies

Increasing our knowledge about livestock-wolf interactions and developing management solutions for livestock ranchers in the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rocky Mountain regions is imperative to helping agriculture begin to cope with wolves.

As reported by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (or NASS) in 2006, cattle losses due to wolf predation were 4,400 head, valued at just over \$2 million. Additionally, NASS reported in 2006 that 16,000 sheep were lost due to predators other than primary animals such as coyotes, dogs and large cat species. Some portion of those 1.4 million dollar sheep losses can be attributed to wolf predation. These numbers do not account for losses that were not confirmed, but which further increased the economic impact on livestock ranchers.

As one rancher wrote last year: "...we are a working cattle ranch and the production of beef is what pays the bills. In the last seven years wolves have become increasingly common, having moved into our area from central Idaho. Over this period we have seen a dramatic increase in livestock losses; confirmed wolf kills, suspected wolf kills and cattle that simply disappear. So far this year we have nearly 20 confirmed or probable wolf kills but the full extent of losses will not be known until we gather in the late fall. We expect that when the counting is complete, we will have lost in excess of 60 calves. Wolves are known to take cows and bulls as well as calves. Last year we were short 15 cows and a bull at the end of the grazing season. Because our livestock records are very complete and go back to a period when wolves were not common, we can document a rise in losses that parallels the increasing wolf numbers.

We have also seen many animals that are severely injured by wolves. It is sobering to see the damage that a wolf can inflict on a calf and we have many that require extensive veterinary care and never fully recover from the attack. Wolf bites frequently become infected and require antibiotics to prevent sepsis." Written by Casey Anderson, Idaho.

Oregon State University, in cooperation with the University of Idaho and the Agricultural Research Service, has been conducting a research project that will help quantify the impacts and, we hope, lead to better management. This research is titled 'Developing an Adaptive Management System and its Components to Address Effects of Gray Wolf Reintroduction on Ecosystem Services.' It has been funded by the Oregon Beef Council for three years to a tune of over \$110,000. Over the past year and a half, additional

funding from the USDA NRI program, amounting to just over \$150,000, has helped. Federal funding is needed to find the answers to livestock/wolf conflict.

The federal and academic research community is uniquely positioned to find the answers for this critical agricultural need. The ongoing research, focusing on monitoring, mitigation, and evaluation of wolf/livestock conflict, will provide crucial resource and economic impact data to members of the agricultural community in the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rocky Mountain regions. This research has been supported in past years by the livestock industry, including us at the Public Lands Council and National Cattleman's Beef Association. This research is, and will continue to be, critical to the survival of ranchers, the stewards of our nation's open spaces, in the face of these aggressive predators.

There are many Questions that this research must help us answer, such as:

- What is the actual cattle **mortality** from wolves?
- What are wolves' effects on
  - **Weight gain**
  - **Conception and abortion rates**
  - **Production costs/profitability**
- Is predation **season dependent**? Are there specific times with greater risk?
- Do cattle's **grazing patterns** change in the presence of wolves?
- Do livestock form more **concentrated herds** when wolves are present?
- Do livestock prefer **specific areas** when wolves are present?
- Do **riparian areas** (or any other identifiable vegetation association) get more or less use by livestock when wolves are present?
- Is there **vegetation improvement** in any landscape areas?

To give you an idea of the university's research to date, it's based on:

- 30 collared cows in areas with wolves
- 30 collared cows in areas without wolves
  - And a pack of up to 12 wolves, with one 90 lb, male wolf collared with a GPS device. Researchers recorded approximately 20,000 wolf locations between May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 and December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

For lack of time, I can't go into the many detailed and telling preliminary findings, but spatial analysis of the wolf/cattle interactions continue, and the economic assessment began this spring.

On behalf of the Public Lands Council, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and ranching families such as my own, I urge you to make sure that the rules and guidelines for the new Agriculture and Food Research Initiative include such research opportunities as the research already going on in Idaho and Oregon today. This funding is critical if we are to answer the toughest questions about livestock/ wolf co-existence.