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Sheep, Shepherds and Wolves in the French Alps.

Michel Meuret, Fred D. Provenza

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REDUCING CONFLICT WITH GRIZZLY BEARS, WOLVES AND ELK

A Western Landowners' Guide





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A Western Landowners' Guide

Western Landowners Alliance is deeply grateful for the landowners and ranchers, resource managers and others listed below whose collective knowledge and hands-on experience created the substance of this guide. This guide is a compilation of contributions from each of these individuals—a resource created by landowners, for landowners.

Contributors

Rick Danvir, Lesli Allison, Hilary and Andrew Anderson, Bryce Andrews, Anis Aoude, Matt Barnes, Brian Bean, Jeff Bectell, Gary Burnett, Mark Coats, Jonathan Costa, Jessica Crowder, Wyatt Donald, Glenn and Caryl Elzinga, Jeremy Gingerich, Greg and Karen Hertel, Chase Hibbard, Carrie Hunt, Gus Holm, Heather Johnson, Erik Kalsta, Race King, Cody Lockhart, Hallie Mahowald, Cole Mannix, David Mannix, Doug McWhirter, Michel Meuret, Arthur Middleton, Abby Nelson, Greg Neudecker, Dean Peterson, Mike Phillips, Virginie Pointeau, Steve Primm, Fred Provenza, J. D. Radakovich, Nelson Shirley, Albert Sommers and Cat Urbigkit.



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Sheep, Shepherds and Wolves

Considering the failure of nonlethal means to protect herds against wolves in France—more than 1,000 animals killed per year over the past 10 years; 12,000 total losses in 2017—researcher Michel Meuret and colleagues recommend targeted and lethal regulatory actions, despite the strictly protected status of wolves.

Without these actions, the state of affairs will become untenable for breeders and herders, as well as for land and local community managers. Grazing abandonment due to intense pressure from wolves will degrade the biodiversity of landscapes.

For nearly 30 years, breeders have been called on to graze in ways that conserve remarkable species habitats and minimize the risk of wildfire. They volunteer to do this because they benefit from paid grazing contracts and because their grazing practices employ talented herders. French natural resource managers realize that mountain habitats grazed for centuries by intensively herded animals have greater biodiversity. After grazing abandonment, or extensive grazing in fenced pastures, woody species increasingly dominate the landscape and grassland-dependent wildlife species disappear.

Then, wolves, one of several protected species in France, arrived on the scene, dispersing from Italy, where they encountered significant poaching. Their return and recolonization were promoted by some as an expression of recovered biodiversity. Their populations have increased in number and they now occupy the entire French Alps, with 60 wolf pack territories. Currently, the density of packs in the region of the Southern Alps is comparable to that of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in the American West.



Livestock farmers receiving financial support from France and the European Union are urged to recruit assistant herders, use numerous guard dogs, secure electric fencing and systematize night penning. These deterrents are increasingly widespread, but they are costly to install, create considerable constraints for breeders and herders, and result in conflicts with hikers, who have experienced unpleasant or harmful confrontations with

in the French Alps



Photo: Michel Meuret INRA

guard dogs. Worse, despite their use, losses due to wolf predation continue to increase.

Why? What went wrong? Wolves, as a strictly protected species in France, have learned to disassociate livestock from humans and humans from danger. For decades, the use of any lethal means to eliminate the most insistent individual wolves or packs has been strictly prohibited. For smart

and opportunistic wolves, the presence of humans working with herds is not associated with an expected and severe threat. Nonlethal deterrents, used alone, have become increasingly crossable barriers. Without targeted removal of wolves that have become conditioned to prey on livestock, the sustainability of livestock production and the biodiversity of landscapes in the French Alps are deeply jeopardized.¹¹

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The Western Landowners Alliance is a landowner-led organization advancing policies and practices that sustain working lands, connected landscapes and native species.

As landowners and managers, we recognize that working lands are the cornerstones of both our rural communities and our ecosystems, supporting livelihoods, local economies and wildlife. We know these things to be interdependent and that the wellbeing of one affects the wellbeing of the others. We also know from experience the many challenges inherent in land ownership and management. WLA provides an advocacy voice, a peer network and a shared knowledge base for landowners striving to keep the land whole and healthy.

In this guide, WLA offers the collective knowledge and hands-on experience of over 30 land, livestock and resource managers constructively engaged in one of the greatest conservation challenges of our time—how to share and manage a wild, working landscape that sustains both people and wildlife.

Through our individual stewardship and collective action, we are committed to leaving the world a better place.

We invite you to join us.

Westernlandowners.org

