The Cost of the Wolf

Washington Ranchers Reluctance to Participate in Wolf Compensation Programs

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Figure 1 Colin and fellow undergraduate Researcher Malia Prescott in an abandoned wolf den in Yellowstone National Park

Background

Washington State, in response to the recent return of grey wolves, adapted a management plan in 2011 that includes the monetary compensation of ranchers who lose livestock to confirmed wolf predation. However, many Washington State ranchers refuse to participate in these compensation programs.

Purpose

To expose the viewpoints of Washington ranchers towards the current compensation program in Washington State.

Methods

We were able to assess the views of 38 Washington State ranchers through numerous key informant and focus group interviews. Ranchers participating in the study were chosen using both purposeful and snowball sampling methods. Interviews were followed by transcription and coding using Nvivo software. Statements relating to the compensation program were then analyzed in order to determine the general attitudes. Additionally, the major reasons for reluctance to participate in the current compensation program were identified and analyzed.

Reason for Reluctance in Participation	General Description	# of Ranchers	# of Occurrences	Total Word Count
1. Current Program Does Not Solve Problems	"the state compensation, it's just a band aid, it's not solving any of the problems"	16	33	1532
2. Pride	The ranching industry is a proud industry without subsides, they have too much pride to take a hand out from the government to keep them in business.	15	29	1482
3. Distrust in Compensation Procedure	It is very difficult to receive compensation because it difficult to confirm a wolf kill through the Fish and Wildlife Department.	14	25	1652
4. Unwanted Government Involvement	Ranchers don't want the government to be involved with their operation. They don't want to be controlled by, or rely on the government to maintain their livelihood.	15	21	1004
5. Compensation is Inadequate, its about more than Money	Ranchers have a personal connection with their cows, no amount of money is going to make them accept predation.	13	20	973
6. Compensation doesn't Cover True Costs, Not Enough Money	There's not enough money to adequately compensate ranchers for their monetary losses caused by the return of wolves.	11	16	802
7. Strings Attached	Ranchers feel that they have to jump through additional hoops and are surrendering some control of their operation when accepting compensation money.	7	14	948
8. Compensation is Paid for With Public Money	Ranchers feel that because compensation is paid for with public money, they are in fact paying for their own compensation though their tax dollars	8	13	595
9. Accepting Compensation is Accepting the Wolf	"if I take compensation money for lost livestock it's like saying, I'm paid the wolves are okay"	5	8	626
10. Not Worth the Work	Ranchers would prefer to put effort into their ranch and not into receiving compensation.	4	10	562

Figure 2 Top 10 Reasons for reluctance in participation in Washington's Compensation Program for livestock killed by wolves.

Quotes

- "Take it back to your professor and tell him, there's just no way to compensate us, to talk us into a wolf, it won't work. We are diametrically opposed. The wolf wants to kill something we own. It will never work. Never work."
- "It's not just a business, those are our animals, and we are the caretakers of those animals, they depend on us, and to allow the wolves to kill them, and be paid for it? Goes against every bit of fiber we have."
- "If I take compensation money, I feel like I've been bought."
- "If you had a pet for a long time, and am not saying that these cows are pets, but the feelings translate to be the same. Would you let someone to come and shoot it and then begin to compensate you for it?"
- "When laws are unjust, resistance this is mandatory. How can you accept a bribe or compensation from the government trying to destroy you?"
- "The state compensation it's just a band aid, it's not solving any of the problems…but at the end of the day it's not gonna work. We all know that."
- "We're American, and we're independent, and were small business, and if I take compensation money for lost livestock it's like saying I'm paid the wolves are okay. No. I don't want the compensation."
- "So right now, unless you find an actual wolf kill and tarp it and secure it and call and have somebody come and determine that yes it was a wolf, there's no compensation."
- "The solution isn't just give us money, it's fix the problem."

Figure 1 Wolf packs in Washington as of March 2014.

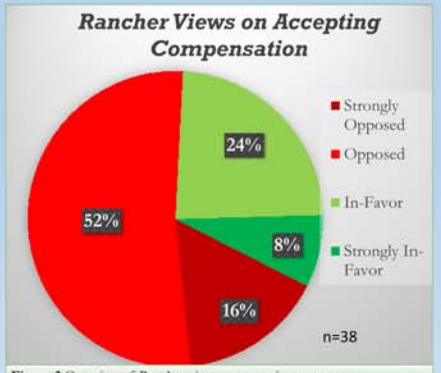

Figure 3 Overview of Rancher views on accepting monetary compensation for livestock lost to wolf predation.

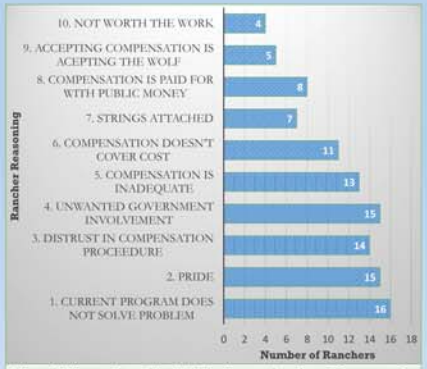

Figure 4 The number of individuals that mentioned specific reasons for reluctance to participate in Washington's Compensation Program

Discussion

Wolves are new to Washington, universal acceptance of the species as well as programs managing conflict will take time to effectively develop. However, it is clear that many ranchers do not believe that the current compensation program is effectively managing conflict between wolves and livestock. Compensation alone will not be able to effectively resolve wolf-livestock conflicts, and ranchers will likely never fully accept loss of livestock to predators. We recommend future programs focus on preventative measures that reduce wolf livestock conflict, rather than focus on retroactive compensation measures.

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