



## *Living With Wildlife in the Northern Rockies*

# Coexisting With Wolves in Idaho's Wood River Valley

*“We all just pulled off what I think is a remarkable accomplishment, which was grazing a band of 1,000 sheep for a month in the immediate daily presence of a wolf pack with no losses of sheep or wolves.”*

—Mike Stevens, President  
Lava Lake Land and Livestock



**A livestock guard dog keeps a watchful eye out for wolves in the Wood River Valley. If a wolf approaches, the dog's bark will alert the shepherd or range rider tending the flock to spring into action.**

**N**estled in the scenic Sawtooth Mountains of south-central Idaho, Wood River Valley seems like the perfect place for wolves. However, this majestic area is also grazing grounds for more than 25,000 sheep every summer. In 2007, a new wolf pack settled in the valley's Blaine County. Just as the pups were getting big enough to travel beyond their den, the sheep grazing season began. The pack preyed on several lambs and was promptly slated for extermination—until Defenders of Wildlife stepped up to help.

Defenders worked with local stakeholders to try nonlethal methods for keeping wolves from preying on livestock, giving the pack a second chance. The following grazing season, in cooperation with Blaine County commissioners and local livestock producers, Defenders' field crew worked with sheep herders to keep livestock and wolves safely apart.

Today, the Wood River Wolf Project is going strong, drawing on experience and a suite of proactive methods and tools: livestock guard dogs to alert sheep and flock attendants, trail cameras to monitor packs, noisemakers, spotlights to scare wolves away and temporary electrified fladry corrals as needed to protect sheep at night. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game provide information on wolf activity from their aerial monitoring flights, and the U.S. Forest Service keeps us abreast of sheep movements on its land. With support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, LightHawk, the Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy, the project has expanded from 120 square miles to more than 1,000 square miles of national forests and private lands with one of the highest concentrations of livestock and wolves in the western United States.

### **A model of success**

Since its inception in 2007, the Wood River Wolf Project has:

- Kept sheep losses to wolves at less than 1 percent—90 percent lower than losses reported in the rest of the state—and wolves killed by wildlife control agents to zero.
- Provided agencies and livestock cooperators with training in radio telemetry monitoring, turbofladry, sound and light deterrents, radio-activated alarm systems, carcass removal and other nonlethal deterrent techniques.
- Co-sponsored wolf-livestock coexistence workshops with the Blaine County Commission to educate area ranchers, state and federal agencies and international researchers about the project and measures that have led to near-zero losses of livestock in the project area.
- Served as a testing ground for nonlethal coexistence methods.
- Created a site-analysis system to collect data and recommend best practices for individual ranchers and land owners.

The project is also becoming one of the largest and most comprehensive wolf coexistence efforts in the country: At the request of Blaine County officials, Defenders is now working to expand the Wood River Valley project countywide to include cattle ranchers as well as sheep producers.

### An inspiration for others

The Wood River Wolf Project has provided many benefits (see box, opposite) with great potential for duplication in other areas where wolves and livestock are present. Inspired by the success of the Wood River model, wildlife biologists in other states and researchers from Europe and Australia are developing similar stakeholder-driven projects to address wildlife and livestock conflicts.

The Wood River Wolf Project demonstrates that even stakeholders with divergent interests can build collaborative relationships that wouldn't exist otherwise by working together to find solutions to conflicts with wolves. This, in turn, reduces conflict among people about sharing the landscape with these predators—a win-win for all.



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## The Benefits of Cooperative Coexistence

The Wood River Wolf Project demonstrates that that proactive prevention pays in many ways:

- Reduces livestock predation by wolves and other predators.
- Lessens the impact of livestock grazing on wolves and other predators.
- Contributes to the economic sustainability of the ranching community and reduces the cost of wolf-livestock management.
- Improves community support of ranching and conservation coexistence practices.
- Builds good working relationships and facilitates collaborative conflict resolution among stakeholders.
- Increases tolerance for wolves and other native wildlife.
- Enhances scientific knowledge through data collection, human dimensions case studies and field application of nonlethal methods.

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### Wood River Project Collaborators and Partners

Lava Lake Land and Livestock

Faulkner Livestock

Henslee Livestock

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Blaine County Commission

U.S.D.A. National Wildlife Research Center

U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Sawtooth-Challis National Forest

Defenders of Wildlife

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Wood River Wolf Project field technicians track the movement of radio-collared wolves so they can assess and quickly address the threats to sheep moving through the area.



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To learn more about Defenders' coexistence work, visit [www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org)