

American Sheep Industry Association's Recommended Best Management Practices for Livestock Protection Dogs

(Prepared by Bryce Reece & Bonnie Brown)

Introduction

Over the last several decades, predator management tools available to the sheep industry have been significantly curtailed and completely eliminated in some circumstances. With the loss of traditional predator management tools, livestock protection dogs (LPD) have become an extremely important means to reduce predator attacks on sheep. LPDs have been used around the world for centuries and have been widely used in the United States since the 1970s. Heavy recreational use on federal lands that have been historically used for sheep grazing and continually expanding rural/urban interface areas have combined to create occasional conflicts between recreationalists and livestock protection dogs, and livestock protection dogs and neighbors in rural/urban interface areas.

Based upon recent events and incidents, The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) strongly believes that the use of LPDs on federal grazing allotments is in serious jeopardy, and anticipates three possible outcomes: 1) Federal land management agencies develop their own mandatory regulations for the use of LPDs on grazing allotments; 2) Federal land management agencies completely eliminate the use of LPDs on grazing allotments; or 3) ASI takes a proactive management position and adopts a LPD management program that recommends industry standards for the use of LPDs with the intent to effectively manage and maintain the use of LPDs on federal grazing allotments.

Farm flock owners are also subject to potential restrictions on use of LPDs because of occasional conflicts with neighbors or the general public.

While the initial reaction of some sheep producers is to “make” the federal agencies (USFS and BLM) keep recreationalists away from sheep, the outcome desired by the permittees most likely will not ultimately be the outcome adopted by the USFS and BLM. The sheep industry has always been a multiple-use advocate of federal lands. As such, the industry needs to acknowledge recreational resource users and work together for collaborative solutions to conflict issues. To put a finer point on the issue, if the sheep industry chooses to “draw a line in the sand” and directly confront recreational users by suggesting that confrontations/conflicts with LPDs is “their” problem, that strategy will most likely backfire and create a significant backlash against the sheep industry from recreational users themselves as well as the general public. This in turn will likely translate into restrictions on the use of LPDs by federal land management agencies, or outright elimination of their use of on federal lands altogether.

When the widespread use of LPDs began in the U.S. there was little if any recreational pressure on federal grazing allotments; and many farm flock producers using LPDs may not have had many neighbors at the time. As a result of this less restrictive operating environment, most producers were able to turn their LPDs out with their sheep with little, if any, need for actual management of the dogs. ASI's *Recommended Best Management Practices for Livestock Protection Dogs* recognizes and acknowledges that fact the sheep producers are required to work in a vastly different environment than they did in the recent past. The recommendations highlight the need for active management of LPDs and gives producers management tools that will help reduce conflicts.

The purpose of ASI's *Recommended Best Management Practices for Livestock Protection Dogs* is to encourage sheep producers using LPD's to adhere to best management practices (BMPs) that optimize the use of these dogs while minimizing potential conflicts with neighbors and other users of federal lands.

Fundamental Program Principles

ASI's *Recommended Best Management Practices for Livestock Protection Dogs (LPDs)* are based on the following concepts:

- ✓ LPDs are vital predator management tools for sheep producers, and ASI will continue working to protect and promote the use of LPDs.
- ✓ Sheep producers operate in increasingly complex environments. Increased recreational pressure on federal grazing allotments and more development in rural areas create potential conflict situations between livestock protection dogs and people. This trend will continue to put pressure on all sheep operations that utilize this vital resource. Since sheep operators are in the minority when dealing with other federal resource users, as well as neighbors in rural areas, it is imperative for sheep producers to identify positive solutions that will garner the understanding and support of people that may come in contact with LPDs.
- ✓ LPD owners are responsible for the actions of their dogs. LPDs should be managed to minimize or eliminate the impacts of LPDs on neighbors and/or recreationalists on federal grazing allotments.
- ✓ It is unacceptable for an LPD to bite a person that is not threatening or harassing the dog(s) or sheep and is not trespassing (in the case of private property) or deliberately disturbing the sheep or dogs on federal grazing allotments.
- ✓ ASI supports multiple-use of federal lands and acknowledges that recreationalists are a component of multiple-use. Federal lands users and agencies should work together to mitigate the impact of individual uses on other resource users.
- ✓ LPDs are intelligent and capable of being trained, while still remaining effective deterrents for predators.

Program Benefits

In the event that an LPD owner's dog is involved in an incident, following ASI's *Recommended Best Management Practices for Livestock Protection Dogs* should help demonstrate that the LPD owner adheres to industry approved recommendations, and may help deflect claims of negligence. Additionally, implementing the best management practices (BMP) should be a cornerstone to maintain positive working relationships with agency staff while managing grazing allotments; and improve relationship with neighbors that may encounter LPDs. Utilizing the BMPs is a positive public relations tool for both the individual participant and the industry overall, as the BMPs are intended to reduce and eliminate potential conflicts.

Future Plans for Consideration by ASI

ASI may consider the providing the following items to LPD owners that want to implement the BMPs:

- ✓ LPD information signs (first 6 signs are free; additional signs can be purchased)
- ✓ LPD owner information cards indicating that the owner follows ASI's recommended BMPs (first 25 cards free, additional cards can be ordered)
- ✓ Plastic storage envelopes for rabies certificates, enrollment cards, etc.
- ✓ Vaccination & health record book
- ✓ LPD informational brochures to distribute to the general public and/or neighbors.

Aspects of LPD Ownership

- ✓ LPD owners need to familiarize themselves with state and local laws and ordinances regarding ownership of dogs and "dogs at large," requirements of dog owners, vaccination requirements and liability of dog owners when their dogs are involved in conflicts with humans, domestic animals or conflicts with wildlife.
- ✓ Owners need to ensure that all applicable State and County laws or statutes are complied with in regard to the ownership and control of LPDs.
- ✓ Owners are encouraged to discuss liability issues with their insurance carrier and make sure they have adequate liability insurance to cover conflict situations between LPDs and humans, domestic animals, and wildlife. Operators should maintain sufficient liability insurance as required by either state law, federal requirements, or as the situation necessitates.

Health Management Recommendations

- ✓ Adequate food and water for LPDs should be available at all times.
- ✓ LPD owners should have one of the following types of identification on each of their dogs: collar and ID tag, microchip, tattoo, or ear tag. Paint brands may be used as a supplemental identification method as long as the brands are adequately refreshed in order to assure that ownership of the LPD can be ascertained.

- ✓ LPD owners should maintain proof of current rabies vaccinations for each LPD. Copies of the rabies certificates (issued by a licensed veterinarian) should be kept at the sheep camp or readily accessible locations at all times.
- ✓ While it is recognized that sexually intact dogs, in some cases, may have characteristics that are beneficial or enhance their livestock protection abilities, as well as the fact that desirable genetics can only be passed along from a sexually intact animal, it is also recognized challenges can arise as a result of their not being spayed or neutered. Producers should be vigilant of these animals and ready to remove them from federal lands if they continually wander beyond the area necessary to protect their sheep or if their disposition lends itself more towards being confined to private lands.
- ✓ LPD owners should spay females, unless the dog is used for breeding purposes.
- ✓ LPD owners should vaccinate dogs for distemper, hepatitis, parvo, and leptospirosis.
- ✓ De-worming for canine specific internal parasites, as well as ovine cysticercosis is highly recommended.
- ✓ Allowing LPDs to feed on sheep carcasses should be discouraged (LPDs feeding on sheep carcasses can serve as hosts for tapeworms that cause Ovine Cysticercosis. Ovine Cysticercosis, commonly referred to as “sheep measles,” is a significant cause of carcass condemnation with a resulting economic loss to the industry).
- ✓ Shearing/clipping/grooming of LPDs should be done as appropriate to maintain the health of the LPD.
- ✓ Sheep producers should not breed LPDs unless they have the time and ability to train the puppies, and a known market to place excess puppies. Purchasing individually trained LPDs from reputable trainers is highly recommended as an alternative to raising pups when producers do not have time, expertise, or ability to raise and train LPD pups.

Livestock Protection Dog Training and Management Recommendations

- ✓ LPDs that show hyper-aggressive behavior towards people or other restrained (leashed) dogs should not be allowed to work on federal lands or private property if the possibility exists for the dogs to stray from the private property into areas where they can cause conflicts with other property owners.
- ✓ LPDs that continually stray away from sheep beyond an area from which they can provide protection to the sheep should not be allowed to work on federal lands.
- ✓ LPDs should be trained to respond to basic voice commands. Dogs that cannot be controlled by voice commands should not be allowed to work on federal lands.
- ✓ LPDs that cannot be easily caught and leashed should not be allowed to work on federal lands.
- ✓ LPDs should be socialized to people. They should be trained so that vehicles, ATVs, hikers (with or without a dog) and bikers do not appear in the dog’s mind to pose a threat to the sheep.

- ✓ LPDs should be tied up on federal lands if a herder is not present and there is concern regarding the potential for conflict between the LPD and other users of federal lands who have a legitimate and lawful right to be on those lands.
- ✓ LPDs should be accounted for and efforts need to be made to assure that LPDs are not left behind when moving sheep. If dogs become separated from their sheep, a priority should be placed on recovering the dog within 24 hours of discovering that the dog is missing.
- ✓ It is recognized and understood that an LPD's primary objective is to ward off predators and protect their sheep and that property lines often times mean little to an LPD who is actively carrying out these duties. In order to reduce conflicts and maintain good relationships with neighbors, LPD owners should strive to train their dogs to stay on their own property while patrolling for predators when sheep are held within fenced pastures. LPD owners should contact adjacent neighbors and explain that LPDs are being used to protect livestock, how LPDs behave when they are performing this function, and that if a predator is approaching or threatening the sheep, the LPD may chase the predator off of the property. If a LPD has left the owner's property, the owner should take immediate action to find the LPD and bring it home.

Livestock Protection Dog Training & Management Recommendations

- ✓ LPDs that show hyper-aggressive and irrational behavior towards people should not be retained for breeding purposes.
- ✓ LPDs that continually stray away off private property into areas from which they cannot protect their sheep and that cannot be easily caught and leashed should not be used.
- ✓ LPD owners should strive to identify LPDs that exhibit targeted aggressiveness toward predators combined with compatibility with people. Sheep producers should consider the various breed of dogs (as well as individual dogs and their personalities in relationship to the kinds of predators to be encountered, as well as the probability of human (including pet dogs, horses, etc.) encounters. Sheep producers should strive for the minimum level of aggressiveness that will protect the flock and yet be compatible with the general public which may come into contact with the LPD.
- ✓ In areas of heavy recreational use, it may be necessary to tie up LPDs that may come into conflict with those recreational users during the day.
- ✓ In areas where potential exists for conflict between LPDs and the public, sheep producers should consider operating with both a day and a night herder, supported by herding dogs, in order to have someone with the sheep and with the LPD dogs at all times.

Herder Education Recommendations

- ✓ Herders should have reasonable access to a phone or radio to contact the livestock owner regarding LPD management issues.
- ✓ Herders should be provided with LPD brochures and information cards that list the livestock owner's name and contact information that can be distributed to the general public and others who may come into contact with the sheep and LPDs. Herders should know where the rabies vaccination certificates are located and should be prepared to share those with appropriate governmental officials/law enforcement if requested.
- ✓ Herders should be instructed and required to contact the livestock owner as soon as possible in order to notify the owner if a LPD is missing so the LPD can be located and returned to the sheep or removed from the allotment.
- ✓ Herders on federal lands should have voice control over LPDs.
- ✓ Herders should actively manage LPDs and will not allow LPDs to roam beyond that area which is reasonable to provide protection to the sheep, or to chase or excessively bark at vehicles, hikers, bikers or wildlife which does not pose a threat to the sheep.
- ✓ Herders should post LPD information signs near the sheep.

Agency Cooperation Recommendations

- ✓ LPD owners should contact appropriate agencies (animal control, sheriff's office, wildlife, veterinarians, etc) and explain the use of LPDs in their area. Owners should advise agencies to contact the LPD owner immediately if an LPD is found or there is a conflict with neighbors, recreationalists or wildlife. LPD owners should make every effort to educate agencies about LPDs and to rectify conflict situations as soon as they arise.

Agency Cooperation Recommendations

- ✓ Sheep producers need to work closely with BLM and USFS staff (and if necessary, wildlife agencies) to avoid potential conflicts that could involve LPDs.
- ✓ Permittees and agencies should cooperate in ensuring that trailheads are posted with appropriate LPD information signs when flocks are in the vicinity and contact is likely.
- ✓ Permittees and agencies should cooperate in developing routing schedules designed to ensure that flocks and associated LPDs are no closer than ¼ mile to any trailhead, significant use trail, developed or significant use dispersed recreational site, etc. during weekends, holidays or other high potential recreational use periods as specified by the agencies.
- ✓ Permittees and agencies should cooperate to ensure that potential overlap of permitted activities such as permitted sheep grazing and recreational events or work project activities is managed to reduce the potential for conflict between the dogs and the other users, and should make timely and appropriate information available to all parties to allow for proactive planning to minimize risk of conflict.

- ✓ Permittees and agencies should consider the use of temporary closure orders to limit recreational use in areas of significant potential conflict.
- ✓ Agencies need to recognize that bicycles and riders bring with them a heightened possibility of conflict. Bicycles tend to be quiet, move at good speed and carry a large profile, all factors that cause instinctive protective reaction and action by LPDs.
- ✓ Sheep producers should work closely with APHIS Wildlife Services and other entities involved in predator control activities to plan and carryout appropriate levels of predator management in order to assure that wildlife causing, or having potential to cause, damage are removed as expeditiously as possible in order to lessen stress on LPDs and potentially reduce the number of LPDs required in a specific area.

Public Relations Management Recommendations

- ✓ LPD owners should strive to maintain positive working relationships with agencies, law enforcement, neighbors and the general public when managing LPDs.