



# FAST FACTS

## ABOUT PREDATOR LOSSES



According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, a total of 194,395<sup>1</sup> head of sheep and lambs were killed by predators in 2014. However, a note to be aware of is that NASS only reports lambs lost after docking. Lambs lost prior to docking are not counted.

The American Sheep Industry Association estimates that approximately 30 percent of predation in lambs occurs prior to docking. According to data collected from five western states that reported pre-docking, lamb-loss numbers in 2014, ASI estimates an additional 50,000 to 60,000 lambs were lost across the entire nation prior to docking.

This adjustment raises the total number of sheep and lamb losses from 194,395 to more than 200,000.

**Common Predators** - Coyotes were responsible for 54.3 percent of total predator kills on sheep, followed by dogs at 21.4 percent and mountain lions/cougars/pumas at 5.6 percent. Bears, fox, eagles, wolves and bobcats also prey on sheep and lambs.<sup>1</sup>

The leading non-lethal control measures used to control predatory kills for the majority of sheep and lambs include guardian dogs and other guardian animals, hunting/trapping, night penning or confinement and fencing.<sup>2</sup> Ranchers and farmers spend in excess of \$9.8 million annually on non-lethal control measures in an effort to safeguard flocks.

**Depredation** - In 2014, 'depredation' - the act of predators killing sheep - accounted for 28.1 percent of adult sheep-death losses and 36.4 percent of lamb-death losses, making it the single largest cause of sheep mortality. It also made it a very expensive one as sheep producers lost more than \$32.5 million in potential income due to predator kills of sheep and lambs.

Depredation accounts for 15 percent of the total cost of sheep production, second only to feed and pasture costs.

**Predator Control Methods** - For centuries, shepherds have guarded their flocks against predators. In recent years, four-footed 'shepherds' - guard dogs, donkeys and llamas - have been enlisted as a predator-control force. They are aided in their duties by electric fences, electric guards, pens and noise-making devices. While sheep producers rely on these and other non-lethal tools as their first line of defense against predators, these methods are not a cure-all for depredation. For example:

- Coyotes and other predators quickly adjust to sounds emitted from noise-making equipment, which can cause the opposite effect of attracting predators to the sheep;
- While guard animals are more effective than noise-making devices, sheep's major predator - the coyote - has been known to use pack strategies to lure guard animals away from sheep. In several recorded cases, coyote packs have attacked and killed guard animals. Wolves in Montana alone killed more than 60 guard dogs in 2003.

ASI encourages non-lethal predator control methods while supporting efforts to establish and maintain adequate predator-management programs nationwide. Chief among these is the Wildlife Services program. Since wildlife is publicly owned, the public shares a responsibility in controlling wildlife damage. Therefore, the Wildlife Services program is a joint private, state and federally funded program designed to reduce problems created when wildlife cause damage to agricultural, urban and natural resources or threaten public health and safety.

<sup>1</sup>Source: USDA, NASS. Sheep & Goat Death Loss, released September 2015. (These numbers are updated every five years.)

<sup>2</sup>American Sheep Industry Association Survey - Compendium of Research Results and Analysis by Producer Region and Flock Size. 2010.