

# ABOUT PREDATOR LOSSES

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, a total of 226,910<sup>1</sup> head of sheep and lambs were killed by predators in 2019 (the most current information available).



## COMMON PREDATORS

Coyotes were responsible for 46.9 percent of total predator kills on sheep, followed by dogs at 33.9 percent and mountain lions at 4.3 percent. Bears, fox, eagles, wolves and bobcats (among others) 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 fencing, night penning and shed lambing. Ranchers and farmers spent \$51.4 million in 2019 on non-lethal control measures in an effort to safeguard flocks, and another \$4.7 million in lethal control methods.

## DEPREDAATION

In 2019, depredation – the act of predators killing sheep – accounted for 32.6 percent of adult sheep-death losses and 40.1 percent of lamb-death losses, making it the single largest cause of sheep mortality. Depredation accounts for 15 percent of the total cost of sheep production, second only to feed and pasture costs. Of the American operations that stopped raising sheep in 2019, 15.8 percent cited predator loss as the primary reason.

## 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.

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, APHIS, NAHMS. Sheep Death Loss, released October 2021. (These numbers are updated every five years.)