

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

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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 (LPDs) have become an extremely important means to reduce predator attacks on sheep. Livestock protection dogs have been used around the world for centuries, and have been widely used in the United States since the 1970's. Heavy recreational use on federal lands and expanding rural/urban interface areas have combined to create occasional conflicts between LPDs and recreationalists and/or neighbors in rural/urban interface areas.

Based upon recent events, 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 eliminate the use of LPDs on grazing allotments; or 3) ASI adopts an LPD program that recommends standards for the use of LPDs with the intent to 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 will most likely not 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 for collaborative solutions to issues. If the sheep industry chooses to confront recreational users by suggesting that conflicts with LPDs is "their" problem, that strategy may create a significant backlash from recreational users themselves as well as the general public, translating into restrictions on the use of LPDs or outright elimination of their use on federal lands.

When the widespread use of LPDs began in the United States, there was little 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 environment, most producers were able to turn their LPDs out with their sheep with little need for management. ASI's *Managing Livestock Protection Dogs* acknowledges sheep producers are required to work in a vastly different environment than they did in the past. These recommendations highlight the

need for active management of LPDs and give producers management tools that will help reduce conflicts.

Purpose

The purpose of ASI's *Management Tips* is to help sheep producers optimize the use of their LPDs while minimizing potential conflicts with neighbors and other users of federal lands. In the event of an LPD/recreationalist conflict, demonstration of compliance with industry approved management suggestions could help deflect claims of negligence toward the LPD owner.

Implementing these management tools helps to maintain positive relationships between the LPD owner, grazing allotment agencies, recreationalists, neighbors to LPD owners and the sheep industry as a whole.

These management tips are geared toward reducing conflicts. Not every management recommendation is applicable to every situation. Conflicts are occurring on federal grazing allotments as well as small flock farms and private property situations; therefore, it is prudent to provide recommendations for both private land and federal grazing scenarios.

Fundamental Program Principles

ASI's *Management Tips LPDs* are based on the following beliefs:

- ✓ 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 between LPDs 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 solutions that will garner the understanding 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 their impacts 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. An LPD that has bitten someone or has demonstrated a high level of aggression towards people should be taken out of service.
- ✓ 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.

- ✓ ASI supports private property rights. As such, farm flock owners using LPDs in rural areas should strive to keep their LPDs on their own property.
- ✓ LPDs are intelligent and capable of being trained while remaining effective deterrents for predators.

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 and health record book.
- ✓ LPD informational brochures to distribute to the general public.

Aspects of LPD Ownership

- ✓ LPD owners need to familiarize themselves with all laws and ordinances (city, county, state and federal) 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 laws or statutes are complied with in regard to the ownership and control of LPDs.

Owners are encouraged to make sure they have adequate liability insurance to cover conflict situations between LPDs and humans, domestic animals and wildlife.

Health Management Recommendations

- ✓ Adequate food and water for LPDs should be provided.
- ✓ Shearing/clipping/grooming of LPDs should be done as appropriate to maintain the health of the LPD.
- ✓ 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 readily accessible at all times.
- ✓ LPD owners should vaccinate dogs for distemper, hepatitis, parvo and leptospirosis. Deworming 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.
- ✓ While it is recognized that sexually intact dogs 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, challenges can arise from LPDs not being spayed or neutered. Producers should be vigilant and have an adaptive management plan for sexually intact LPDs:
 - Intact males can be more prone to wandering away from the sheep, which leave the sheep exposed to predator attacks.
 - Intact males are also more prone to fighting with domestic dogs that they may encounter or seek out.
 - Intact females may distract other LPDs from their duties to guard sheep
 - Intact females may create fighting among other LPDs, as well as attract other domestic and wild canines to the flock.
 - Spaying and neutering is one management alternative to address the above mentioned issues.
 - LPD owners may want to consider removing sexually intact animals from federal grazing allotments if their behavior is counter-productive to protecting the sheep.
 - LPD owners in farm flock environments may want to consider penning up female LPDs during heat cycles or restricting the movement of intact males if their behavior is counter-productive to protecting their flock.
- ✓ Sheep producers should not breed LPDs unless they have the time and ability to train the puppies, as well as a market to place excess puppies.
- ✓ Purchasing older, started working LPD pups from reputable farms and ranches is highly recommended.

Livestock Protection Dog Training & Management Recommendations

- ✓ LPDs that show hyper-aggressive behavior towards people or other restrained dogs should not be allowed to work on federal lands. These dogs should also not be used on private property if the possibility exists for the dogs to stray into areas where they can cause conflicts with other property owners.
- ✓ 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 in relationship to the kinds of predators to be encountered, as well as the probability of human (including pet dogs, horses, etc.) encounters. LPD owners 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.

- ✓ LPDs that continually stray beyond an area from which they can protect sheep should not work on federal lands.
- ✓ LPDs should be trained to respond to the NO command to stop undesirable behavior such as chasing a vehicle or aggressively approaching a stranger. Dogs that will not respond to this command should not be allowed to work on federal lands.
- ✓ LPDs that cannot be caught should not be allowed to work on federal lands.
- ✓ LPDs should be social enough to help them recognize that typically people do not pose a threat to the sheep. LPDs should also be exposed to vehicles, ATVs, hikers and bikers to learn that these situations typically do not pose a threat to the sheep.
- ✓ LPD owners may want to consider tying up their dogs on federal lands if a herder is not present and there is concern for the potential for conflict between LPDs and federal lands users during the herder's absence.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Managing LPDs on private property presents unique challenges. 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 keep their dogs on their own property, which may mean significant improvements to property lines.
 - LPD owners should contact adjacent neighbors and explain that LPDs are being used to protect livestock, how LPDs behave when they are performing their duties and if a predator is approaching or threatening the sheep, the LPD may chase the predator off of the property.
 - If an LPD has left the owner's property, the owner should take immediate action to find their LPD and bring it home.
 - LPDs that continually stray away from private property into areas from which they cannot protect their sheep and that cannot be easily caught and leashed should not be used.
 - Owners of LPDs should make a special effort to inform neighbors about their LPD, explaining that it may take some time for the dog to get settled in with its flock and new settings and to contact the owner immediately if the LPD has strayed onto their property.
- ✓ LPD owners in farm flock environments should also explain to their neighbors that LPD perceive other canines as a threat to the sheep, and if other dogs stray near the sheep, they may be injured or killed by the LPD.

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 LPD's. 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 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 returned to the sheep or removed from the allotment.
- ✓ Herders on federal lands should have voice control over LPDs using the command NO to stop undesirable behavior.
- ✓ Herders should 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 that does not pose a threat to the sheep.
- ✓ Herders should post LPD information signs near the sheep and/or sheep camp.

Agency Cooperation Recommendations

- ✓ LPD owners should contact appropriate agencies (animal control, sheriff's office, wildlife department, veterinarians, etc.) and explain the use of LPDs in their area.
- ✓ Owners should advise agencies to contact them immediately if an LPD is found or if 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.
- ✓ 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 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.