

Wildlife, whether native, invasive or feral, has the ability to cause damage to private and public lands, public waterways, and wildlife habitats. In some cases, damage to agricultural crops, domestic livestock, private or public structures, or other working lands can be quite costly in terms of both financial or productivity losses. Wildlife damage regulations, a surprisingly dynamic field of public policy, can help protect Montana's rural way of life while building tolerance for wildlife on the landscape. However, we need to recognize that native wildlife's presence on the landscape predates our development of lands within Montana's borders. Because of this, we are careful in our consideration of positions regarding wildlife damage and especially wildlife damage compensation or mitigation measures.



Numerous state programs exist to compensate landowners and producers for wildlife damage, and a few contribute directly to building a tolerance for the presence of both predators and other large wildlife species on the landscape. Existing programs include financial compensation through the state's Livestock Loss Program and programs that make it easier for ranchers experiencing depredation to harvest wolves that were caught in the act. Additional options exist for ranchers and individuals to work with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to remove problem animals of most species. When considering any wildlife damage issue, there are many social, economic, biological, and environmental factors Montana Audubon must consider.

The policy of Montana Audubon regarding Wildlife Damage is to:

- Educate the public and decision makers about the pros and cons, biological, economic, or other, of supporting wildlife damage reimbursement programs
- Oppose the overreach of the livestock loss program, including inclusion of too many predator species beyond predators like bears and wolves
- Oppose the over reach of reimbursement programs seeking to include reimbursement for native forage consumed by wildlife ungulates or other wild herbivores that are a public resource
- Prioritize measures that reduce or prevent wildlife damage over those that mitigate damage once it has occurred or remove native wildlife lethally
- Oppose the use of poison, chemicals, or other inhumane or unsafe methods of removing animals believed to be responsible for damage
- Encourage improved methods of assessing damage and damage management
- Encourage the involvement of all stakeholders when adopting wildlife damage policies