

## Wolves kill llamas near Butte

SUSAN DUNLAP | Nov 1, 2019



A pack of wolves killed eight llamas in the Basin Creek area southeast of Butte last month.

John Steuber, state director of U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services, said three llamas were confirmed wolf kills. The other five are considered probable.

"It was all in the same area," he said. "The five were older but it was pretty clear they were all killed by wolves."

Steuber said wolf, mountain lion and grizzly bear depredations of livestock take place all the time across the state.

"It's not extraordinary," he said.

But what was a little uncommon about this incident is that wolves don't normally kill multiple livestock animals at once.

"Most commonly, they get one kill at a time," Steuber said.

Even so, Jeff LeFever, who lives off Basin Creek Road, said he is worried about his own animals, as well as hikers, bikers and other recreationists in the area. LeFever said the wolves are hanging around Basin Creek Reservoir.

But Nathan Lance, Fish, Wildlife and Parks wolf biologist, said wolf attacks on humans are rare.

He says that if people have concerns about potential encounters they should carry pepper spray. But he said, "there are greater risks out there."

"I work with wolves in the field, I trap them, I work by myself, I don't carry a gun or pepper spray," Lance said. "My biggest concern with humans (and wolf encounters) is their dogs."

Lance said that if a person does meet a wolf, the best strategy is to stand tall, act aggressively, throw rocks, and slowly back away.

Steuber listed off the animals people in the Basin Creek area might want to do their best to protect, given the wolves' presence: dogs, cats, sheep, calves or other small animals.

Also, the wolves will be killed, Steuber said.

"Once a pack gets into trouble, it can be difficult to relocate them and there are liability issues with relocating problem animals," Steuber said.

But the next step for Wildlife Services will be to get a radio collar onto one or more of the wolves in the pack so the agency can understand the dynamics of the pack and where they are.

Lance said there are eight wolves in the pack and he said they are called the Spire Pack. He said they are living in the Highland Mountains south of Butte.

Lance said there are wolves living all around the Mining City.

“They follow the food,” Lance said.

He said that besides the pack in the Highlands, another pack lives in the Mount Haggin and Fleecer mountains west of Butte and another pack roams near Deer Lodge.

“Those are the three closest,” Lance said.

That doesn’t count the random lone wolf or pairs of wolves that might also be on the landscape. He said the area is “saturated territory” for wolves.

Lance said wolf packs can range about 350 square miles for their territory. He also said wolves are “opportunistic” animals and that livestock-wolf conflict ebbs and flows.

“The bulk of wolves are in western Montana,” Lance said.

Owners of livestock who suffer wolf or other wildlife depredation can receive some compensation for their loss, said George Edwards, executive director of Montana Livestock Loss Board.

Wildlife Services has to be able to verify the kill came from a predatory animal, Edwards said.

Edwards said the compensation can be \$600 per animal. Or if the owner has a receipt from purchasing the downed livestock, then the compensation can be higher, he said.