

A call for a national collaborative predator coexistence program

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Across the globe, negative interactions between livestock and large predators, such as bears and wolves, drive conflicts that pit livelihoods and cultural traditions against predator conservation and recovery. In the United States in particular, public rangelands – where livestock grazing and predator populations overlap – are vast, covering approximately 247 million acres. As large predator populations continue to recover from historical extirpations, livestock depredation by predators and the killing of predators to reduce livestock losses on these multi-use public lands continue to fuel highly polarizing debates and policy conflicts about predator conservation.

There are, however, encouraging signs that local communities are increasingly willing to find ways to coexist with large predators. For example, a suite of nonlethal management techniques such as the use of range riders, guard dogs, and fencing have been voluntarily implemented in several ranching communities. While the success of these programs are promising, they remain localized and dependent on individual motivations and sporadic funding.

To scale up these local initiatives, we propose a national-level program that would incentivize coexistence across multi-use landscapes. Such a program would build off of the best practices of local coexistence initiatives as well as other collaboration-based programs at the federal level, such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) Program. Much like the CFLR Program, we envision collaborative groups with diverse interests competing for funding based on their ability to reduce conflicts and sustain coexistence criteria. These criteria should be developed from the bottom-up, building from common ground between different stakeholder groups, and include a range of sociopolitical and ecological factors. Further, the program should focus on building capacity at the community level through, for example, the establishment of

partnerships with local universities or state agencies, or by providing leadership training.

We recognize this program would not be without its challenges - addressing the lack of trust in institutions, bridging divergent values and viewpoints of different stakeholders, and sustaining funding, to name a few. However, a national program would more effectively and efficiently address systemic problems on public rangelands – reducing high-cost conflicts and supporting the public interest in coexisting with large predators.



grizzly bear (Ursus arctos)

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