

Living with Wolves: A rancher's perspective

Posted: Feb 19, 2010 9:00 PM by Mark Holyoak

Missoula, MT

<http://www.kpax.com/news/living-with-wolves-a-ranchers-perspective/>

The Montana Department of Livestock reports 367 confirmed wolf kills of livestock in 2009 and eight so far this year, after the latest report of wolves killing two steers in a Sanders County feedlot.

One rancher who lives south of the Bitterroot Valley says he's getting out of the full-time ranching business, not because he wants to, but because wolves gave him no other choice.

Jerry Ehmann is a fourth generation rancher and he and all of his cattle survived the fires of 2000 that surrounded his home and pasture, but he's not so sure his way of life will survive a growing wolf population.

"I don't know why they had to be introduced to the degree they are now because they're causing trouble for the livestock producer."

Last summer, as usual, he ran his 240 head of cattle into the 25,000 acres of hilly and mountainous state and federal land he leases, but not all of them returned home. "I can't prove it, but five cows came dry out of the hills without calves and I don't know what else it could be. It never happened before" Ehmann told us.

Because of that, he since trimmed his herd size down to just 75 and keeps them on nearby pasture, a cattle operation he says is no longer financially viable. "Luckily, we started a gravel and excavating business five years ago to help subsidize the cattle income and that was a good thing we did that."

But it's cattle ranching Ehmann loves, a legacy he wants to pass on to his sons and their sons, despite the growing presence of the wolf. "I'd like to see it continue but I don't see how, with the problem we have here. It looks like the beginning of the end."

Ehmann added that he doesn't want wolves driven to extinction; he just wants them in places where they're more welcome, like Alaska and Canada, not in the backyards of ranchers.