

# Livestock Guard Dog Case Study

Lone Wolf Ranch,  
Coke County

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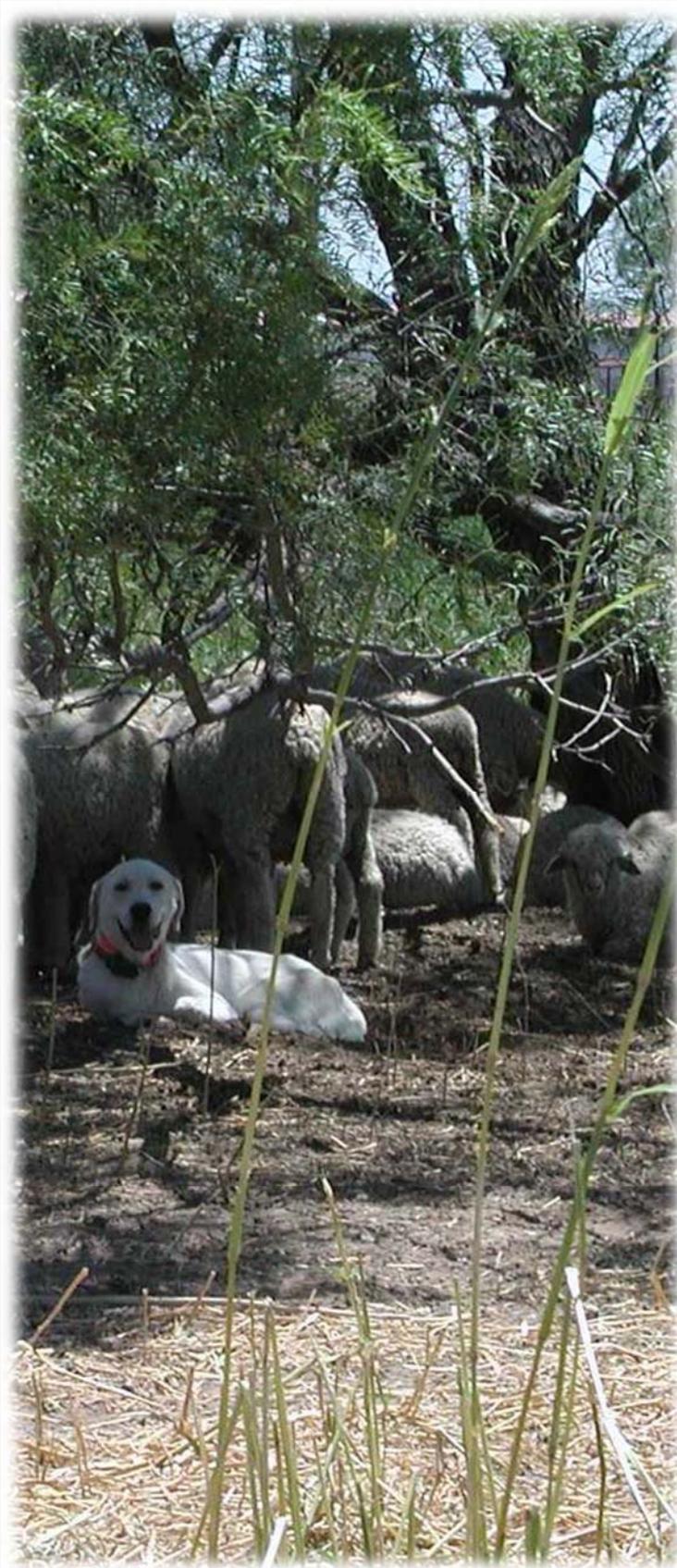
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# **Livestock Guard Dog Case Study**

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## **Scenario** \_\_\_\_\_

Two similar groups of ewes were put into different pastures a few miles apart near Water Valley, Texas. Dogs were used to protect one group of sheep and the other was protected with conventional trapping. The pastures are moderately rough with moderate brush density. In recent years, predators have been an increasing problem.

## **Overall Management Plan** \_\_\_\_\_

Two bonded livestock guardian dogs (5R Stock Dogs, Billings MT) were placed with 250 finewool ewes. The sheep and dogs were held in a small set of working pens (2 acres) for 24 hours and they were released into the pasture the next morning. The dogs remained in this pasture with ewes and lambs until weaning time. After weaning, the dog remained with ewes in a new pasture. In the fall, a different set of ewes started lambing and the remaining dog relocated to this group of ewes.

## **General Observations** \_\_\_\_\_

The sheep and dogs were checked daily or every other day, when possible. The dogs stayed in the pasture with the sheep and there were no reports of them straying off property. The dogs were most often seen with sheep and they kept their distance from people. The larger dog was more dominant and tended to run off the smaller dog. The dominant dog was removed from the ranch due to concerns that the dog was killing 2 month-old lambs.

## **Predation** \_\_\_\_\_

It was reported that around 12 lambs were lost to one of the livestock guardian dogs. No confirmed losses occurred due to common predators in either pasture. In the pasture that did not have dogs, trappers caught multiple coyotes and bobcats. In both pastures, feral pigs and evidence of feral pigs were seen. Within a few weeks after the dogs were placed with sheep, the feral pigs were no longer seen in this pasture.

## Camera Trapping

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Two game cameras were put out for one month quarterly during the year. They were checked weekly. Locations were selected that were likely to catch predator movement, along roads, near water sources, etc. A high number of feral swine were caught on camera prior to placement of the dogs. Shortly after placement of the dogs, a coyote and bobcat were detected. Very limited number of predators were detected by the game cameras in the spring, summer and fall after placement of the dogs, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Predators detected with game camera survey.

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Coyote	1	0	0	0
Bobcat	1	0	0	0
Red Fox	0	0	0	0
Grey Fox	0	1	0	0
Feral Swine	20	0	0	0

## Lamb Crop

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Weaning rate was 96% in the pasture with the guard dogs and 113% in the pasture that was protected with trapping. It was disappointing that lamb loss occurred in the pasture with dogs. However, it is also important to note the trapping was effective, because predators were caught prior to any major lamb loss occurred. This could be due to less need for trapping, since part of the operation was not being trapped. The fall lambing ewes have not experienced any lamb loss to predation.

## Problems

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Initially the dogs were not eating from the self-feeders. In addition, feral pigs may have gotten into the feeder shortly after the dogs were placed. The dominant dog was inhibiting the smaller dog from eating. The dogs were fed by hand throughout the project. At the beginning, no lambs were being lost. However, once the lambs were a couple months old, a few dead lambs were found and the dog/s were feeding on the carcass. Thereafter, a dead lamb was found once per week for a month or two. At dusk one evening, the larger dog was spotted chasing a lamb and biting at its neck. The next morning, the lamb was found dead. At weaning, the dominant dog was removed from the ranch.

## Question and Answer: Craig Demere \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **What were the most positive benefits of the program?**

Trying something different made me a better manager because we paid closer attention to what was going on. We were pleased to not have seen any sign of predators or caught any pictures of predators on the game cameras that were located in the pasture with ewes and lambs.

➤ **What was the greatest challenge with the program?**

We don't know where to find good dogs. We were also told that dogs don't kill older lambs but are sure that we had a dog killing lambs. We want dogs that can be caught and are leash broken.

➤ **What are your plans for the future related to guard dogs?**

We are looking into getting a young dog to bond with next year's ewe lambs.

➤ **What would you have done differently?**

At the beginning, I would have started feeding the dogs canned food by hand, daily or every other day.

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