



Management of Livestock Guardian Dogs on Hunting Leases

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Hunting leases on Texas ranches serve as an excellent revenue stream for livestock producers, with fees typically ranging from \$2 to \$15 per acre. This additional income can significantly impact a ranch's financial health, often determining whether it operates at a profit or struggles to make ends meet. Managing these leases requires minimal effort, and with proper documentation and regular updates, this task can be efficiently streamlined. Creating and maintaining the appropriate lease paperwork is essential for keeping the rancher in control and organized. Furthermore, ensuring good access to the ranch and maintaining campsites in optimal condition during the off-season can help minimize any issues during the hunting season.

Hunting Issues on Ranches Using LGDs

Ranchers who raise small ruminant livestock often utilize livestock guardian dogs (LGDs) to protect their animals, but these dogs can pose challenges for hunters during peak hunting periods if not managed appropriately. Some ranchers may provide designated fenced areas with essential amenities for hunters' trailers, while others offer basic parking spaces in the pasture. Creating fenced areas separate from pastures with LGDs might be the best solution to prevent the dogs from disturbing hunters' camping areas.

One common issue reported by hunters on ranches that use LGDs for predator control is the dogs chasing game species. According to anecdotal evidence from producer interviews with AgriLife personnel, ranchers who are new to LGDs or have young LGDs typically encounter the most challenges with dogs, hunters,

and wildlife interactions. It is possible that young dogs view deer and other game species as threats to their charges and attempt to chase them away. As the dogs mature, they learn to recognize these animals as non-threats and allow them to graze freely in and around their charges. Some ranchers claim to observe an increase in the presence of game species in pastures with mature LGDs, indicating responsible management of the dogs and a reduction in predators, leading to more offspring of game species thriving and reproducing.



Figure 1. Wildlife feeder with corn piled up from a lack of deer due to LGDs in the pasture. (AgriLife picture courtesy of Taylor, 2023)

Other issues hunters report with LGDs include disturbing deer and turkeys by scaring them off from feeders, dogs barking around campsites at night, dogs near occupied hunting blinds, observation of only young deer unable to escape from the dogs by jumping fences, dogs consuming deer carcasses, and dogs following hunters around.

Hunter and LGD Interaction

It is vital for ranchers using LGDs to educate their guide service and hunters on how to interact with the dogs should they encounter them. A common misconception among hunters is that LGDs are similar to hunting or pet dogs, leading them to offer treats and affection to the dogs when they come across them in the field.

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Figure 2. LGD eating a deer leg. (AgriLife picture courtesy of Werner, 2023)

However, ranchers should discourage this behavior as it can inadvertently encourage the dogs to follow the hunters to their blinds and campsites in search of more rewards. The dogs often bark for attention, which can disrupt the hunting experience, scaring off game in

the area and potentially ruining hunting opportunities.

Furthermore, ranchers should emphasize the need for hunters to clean game animals in a centralized location away from campsites and blinds to deter the LGDs from frequenting those areas during hunting times. When hunters are present on the ranch, it may also benefit livestock producers to move their livestock and LGDs to non-hunting pastures.

Ranchers should stress to hunters that shooting at LGDs to scare them away can make the dogs fearful of humans and challenging for the producer to manage. The best approach for hunters is to ignore LGDs when they encounter them. Typically, the dogs will investigate the hunters and their surroundings and leave if they are not rewarded with food or positive attention.



Figure 3. LGD protecting a fawn. (AgriLife picture courtesy of Pfeiffer Ranch, 2018)

Below are some great tips from the Colorado Sheep Industry on interacting with LGDs on a hunting lease that ranchers should give to hunters on their property each year.

DO...

- Keep your dog on a leash, and never allow your dog to run towards or harass the livestock.
- Watch for LGDs near livestock (usually large white or tan dogs).
- Remain calm if an LGD approaches.
- If stopped, put your ATV between you and the LGD.
- Tell the LGD to “go back to the sheep/goats” or say “no” in a firm voice.

- Keep your distance from the livestock and choose the least disruptive route around the animals.
- If the livestock are trailing, be still and quiet and wait for them to pass.

DO NOT...

- Chase, scare, or harass the livestock or LGDs.
- Shoot at or over the LGDs.
- Try to outrun the LGDs.
- Yell or throw things at the LGDs.
- Make quick or sudden movements.
- Feed the LGDs.
- Take a companion dog with you to the blind or to scout for wildlife.
- Attempt to befriend or pet the LGD. They are slightly aloof and do not want to make friends with you.
- Leave gates open that were closed or close gates that were open. Always leave a gate the way you found it!

Hunting Options on a Ranch with LGDs

When hunting on ranches where LGDs are utilized, the flexibility of blinds and feeders is crucial. Hunters can employ various strategies to effectively navigate the presence of LGDs and optimize their hunting prospects on ranches that rely on these dogs for livestock protection.

- First, contact the rancher to determine where LGDs and livestock will be located during the hunting season.
- Avoid pastures with livestock and LGDs during the season.



Figure 4. Blind (red) set up in view of multiple water troughs (blue) and pastures. (AgriLife picture courtesy of Taylor, 2023)

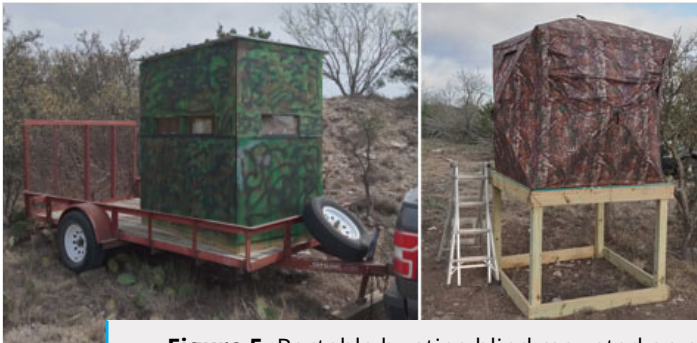


Figure 5. Portable hunting blind mounted on a trailer on the left. A temporary blind and stand on the right. (AgriLife pictures courtesy of Taylor, 2023)

- Position blinds and feeders to avoid livestock and LGDs. When possible, place them in separate pastures while still within shooting distance of each other.
- Try to use temporary or portable blinds that can be moved easily.
- Set up extra blinds in unused areas as a backup in case livestock and LGDs are present in a preferred hunting location.
- Center the game feeder inside pens to reduce the feed spread outside the fence and discourage livestock and LGDs from hanging out there.
- Ensure fences are large enough to keep feed within the boundaries.
- Pop-up, tripod, and quad blinds are economical, easily set up, and can be transported to different locations.
- Maximize hunting options while limiting the chances of interaction if there are no other alternatives.
- If hunters and LGDs must interact, add additional blinds in the same pasture to increase the odds of seeing deer.

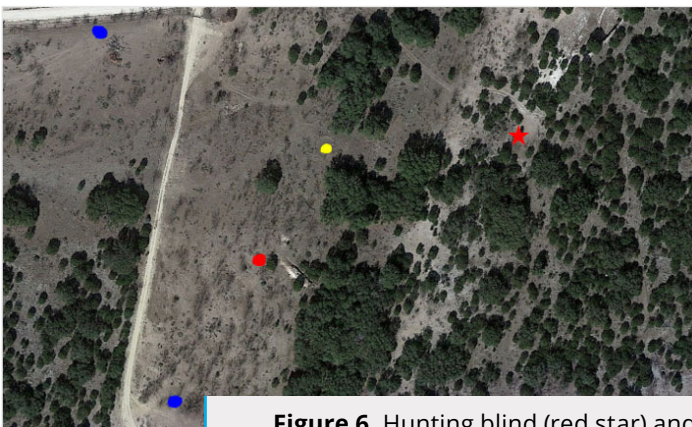


Figure 6. Hunting blind (red star) and extra hunting blind (red circle) set up to cover feeder (yellow) and water troughs (blue). (AgriLife picture courtesy of Taylor, 2023)

- Introduce multiple attractants (feeder, water, alfalfa, etc.) at different locations but within the blind range. This provides alternate shooting opportunities should the livestock and LGDs be present at one location or in the line of fire.
- Position blinds within range of multiple pastures on the ranch.



Figure 7. A feeder properly centered in the middle of the enclosure. (AgriLife picture courtesy of Taylor, 2023)

LGDs are crucial in aiding ranchers to mitigate predation on their livestock. With their notable efficacy in controlling predation on small ruminants, the popularity of using dogs among ranchers continues to grow annually. While hunting leases serve as a vital source of revenue for ranchers, they must establish effective communication channels with hunters concerning interactions with LGDs. Educating hunters and outfitters on the functionality of LGDs is essential, and they must devise innovative approaches to collaboratively engage with the dogs, rather than working against them, within their leases. In summary, effective communication between producers and hunters, the adaptability of blinds, and the generation of innovative strategies are pivotal in successfully integrating LGDs within a hunting lease.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank Mark Taylor, owner of Koda Ranch and Prescribed Hunts, for working with Texas A&M AgriLife – San Angelo on this fact sheet. Mark is the guide and outfitter at the Sonora AgriLife Research Station in Sonora, TX. We also want to thank the Colorado Sheep Industry for their assistance with this fact sheet.



Figure 8. Axis deer at a wildlife feeder on the Texas A&M AgriLife Sonora Station. (AgriLife picture courtesy of Taylor, 2023)