## Addressing wolf-livestock conflict through partnership

By Rachel White
Published May 19, 2025

**In This Together**
*The Pacific Northwest Research Station is encouraging projects like this that follow the principles of "coproduction" – an approach to research that fosters deeply rewarding partnerships with those who need and use information, so that they can help enhance the accessibility of the work.*

Since their reintroduction in the 1990s, gray wolves have moved back into areas from where they were once extirpated. Wolf packs are now established in several Western states where the Forest Service manages land to provide habitat for wildlife, including wolves, while also providing forage for domestic livestock production through grazing permits. More than 5,000 grazing permittees use national forest allotments to support their livestock. The overlapping occurrence of livestock and wolves sometimes leads to conflict.

Research social scientist Susan Charnley studies this conflict, and the possibility for wolf and livestock coexistence. Her work often encompasses both social and natural systems, such as exploring how best to achieve dual goals of environmental conservation and rural community well-being.

"I initiated this research on wolves and livestock because Robert Garcia, the Regional Range Program Manager from (USDA Forest Service) Region 6 came to me and said this issue is a big concern in our region. They needed to figure out how to address social conflict around wolves on national forests and asked if there was any social science that could help," said Charnley.

Charnley jumped at the chance to help and enlisted three research collaborators, including Jeff Martin, now a research social scientist at the Pacific Southwest Research Station; Rob Anderson, now a researcher with the University of Washington; and Katie Epstein, now the director of conservation science with The Nature Conservancy in Maine.

"We convened a group of range program managers from different national forests where wolves are creating issues for their grazing permittees, and we collectively developed a project. As we've worked through the research process, they acted as our advisory

committee," she said. "If I had questions or I didn't understand something I went to them. They also provided input on how we could best meet their information needs."

Charnley and her team interviewed managers on six different national forests across six Western states (California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming) to elicit in-depth information about the social, ecological, and policy settings that influence wolf-livestock conflict and mitigation options.

The resulting six case studies provide detailed examples of strategies for managing wolves and livestock.

"We were able to show how conflict reduction strategies are influenced by local landscape characteristics, regional social dynamics around wolves, economic constraints, and other factors. I think it was a great example of coproduction," Charnley said.

Expanding on her thoughts about coproducing research, Charnley added, "I am a social scientist, and I think when you say coproduction it can mean a lot of different things. There are a lot of ways you can go about coproduction and different approaches are appropriate in different cases."

A rancher grazes his cattle on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in Montana. ***Photo Credit:*** *USDA photo by Preston Keres.*

In this case, it was important to engage land managers, who are the "boots on the ground" and uniquely positioned to participate in debate about how to navigate the diverse wishes of interest groups.

“Having that advisory committee worked really well for this project. It didn’t require a lot of time from partners—we engaged them when we needed them,” Charnley added.

Charnley’s study about the promise of wolf-livestock coexistence illustrates how valuable it can be for researchers to engage with people who are interested in the work. If wolves and livestock can coexist, surely scientists and land managers can work together too.