

# Ungulate and Predator Pressure

*“Not only do we have to consider managing a cattle herd, but also a wildlife herd.”*  
Sarah Davies  
Lone Prairie



Ungulate grazing of pasture on Rainey Ranch.

## Producer Situation

Sarah Davies and Steve Rainey are the second generation to operate Rainey Ranch in the Lone Prairie valley near Chetwynd, BC. They run about 250 cows on both deeded land and crown grazing.

## Wildlife Pressures

Their operation sees the most wildlife damage from elk and deer. Approximately 200 elk reside in the Lone Prairie valley and another 200 travel through sometime from winter to spring according to local observation. Deer are the biggest nuisance from early winter to spring, and both mule and whitetail are present on the ranch. Wolves and coyotes create an equally significant impact to the ranch, however damage is concentrated from late spring to fall.

## What Have They Tried?

Sarah and Steve have tried various types of winter feeding, but when the ungulates are around they are forced to bale feed their cattle daily. This is not due to wildlife pushing their cattle off feed; it is because the wildlife will go ahead of the cattle and tear down bales and bed/urinate/defecate in them. All of their winter feed has to be stored in a wildlife fenced stackyard, which limits which areas on the ranch they can utilize their cattle and manure on. They attempted swath grazing once, but elk would get into swaths ahead of the cattle and rip them open. Combined with them bedding, urinating and defecating on the swaths, the feed was then susceptible to snow and icing up. They have also tried bale grazing, but the wildlife would pick through the bales with any legumes and leave the poorer quality feed (plain grass hay) for the cattle.

## Mitigation Strategies for Ungulates and Success Rating

Strategy	Success Rating*	Reasons/Details
Stackyard fence	5	Wildlife game fence
Changing fence designs	4	Use large solid brace posts with electric fencing (when a smaller one would of done) since elk broke the smaller ones
Hunting	5	Aug 10 - Feb 28: coordinates hunters to keep hunting pressure on land

\*1 to 5, 1 = poor, 5 = effective

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### Stress and Cattle Conception Rates

The incidence of stress in cattle has shown to disrupt the surge of the hormone responsible for ovulation. These cows still show estrus (heat) but will not get pregnant from breeding because they did not ovulate. This concept can be applied to predator pressure as they exert tremendous stress on cattle. If this stress occurs in the breeding season there is potential to disrupt hormone signals and end up with open cows.

Stoebel, D.P. and G.P. Moberg. 1982. Repeated acute stress during follicular phase and luteinizing hormone surge in dairy heifers. *Journal of Dairy Science* 65:

### Predator Pressure

Sarah and Steve intensively graze their cattle and predator pressure has a large impact on when and where they graze. To help mitigate these problems, a hunter and trapper has come out many years to effectively deter predators. They also encourage hunters to shoot at wolves and coyotes on their property.

Throughout calving, Steve and Sarah spend hours patrolling their herd to ward off potential predators looking for vulnerable calves. Keeping their cattle closer to home during breeding, is crucial to maintaining their herd productivity. One summer they experienced higher than normal wolf pressure at the end of August, which is only two weeks into their breeding season. This time of year is when the wolves are teaching their pups to hunt and can wreak havoc on a cow herd.

They hired a predator hunter/trapper to deal with the abnormally large wolf population. This meant leaving their cattle in the area for two weeks, so this person could lure the wolves out. Without realizing the stress impact on their cattle, Sarah and Steve continued with their breeding program after the hunter/trapper left and pulled their bulls after 45 to 60 days. The next year they started calving normally for the first two weeks and then they had a two week gap where they received no calves. When they started calving again they had a lot of cows who had apparently missed their heat cycle during the breeding season and were open.

Wolf and coyote kills are also part of the problem. In the same summer that they terrorized their cows during breeding, they also lost 20 calves.

### What Worked

Hunter pressure has proved the most successful mitigation strategy for Rainey Ranch. They coordinate hunters so they are present on their land during elk, moose and deer hunting seasons. Another successful wildlife damage deterrent is their wildlife stackyard.

Currently, Sarah and Steve are cooperators in the 3-D fencing project and have placed a stackyard about 1.3km south of their home.

### What Didn't Work

Sarah and Steve have been managing the wildlife on their operation for many years and have discovered what strategies work best for their situation. They still experience some losses/damage from wildlife but not near to the extent that they use to.



Dead calf found on Rainey Ranch that was attacked by wolves.

**Compiled by:** Talon Johnson and Sarah Davies in January 2012.

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