Predation Management Guide

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Saskatchewan

Producer's Guide to Predation Management

Predators such as coyotes, wolves, bears, cougars and ravens offer important ecological benefits to Saskatchewan's agricultural sector by helping control populations of prey species that can damage crops, spread disease or affect forage availability for livestock. Ecosystems are complex and by managing attractants and supporting healthy predator populations, producers promote a more balanced and resilient agricultural landscape.

However, conflict can occur with predators when they begin preying on livestock. Livestock are easy prey during certain times of the year, especially when ranches are located in areas near predator habitat. Over time, this may lead to bolder behaviour, including approaching barns, corrals or pastures and could eventually lead to preying on livestock. Once a predator learns that livestock are an easy, reliable food source, it may return repeatedly, increasing the risk of ongoing losses.

While occasional livestock predation should be expected, producers can take proactive steps to reduce this risk to their operations. Proactive livestock management, predator-resistant fencing, guardian animals, deadstock management, secure birthing areas, temporary deterrents (e.g., lights, noise-makers) and targeted removal can strike a balance between conserving predators for the benefits they provide and production goals. By understanding local predator behaviour and implementing preventative strategies specific to those species, producers can protect their operations while supporting healthy ecosystems.

1. Which Predators are You Co-Existing With?

Identifying which predator species you are dealing with and understanding their distinct predation styles is beneficial to effectively preventing livestock losses. Each predator leaves behind unique signs, such as bite marks, feeding patterns or carcass handling, that can help identify the species responsible. Accurate species identification allows producers to tailor the tools and strategies they use, whether that means reinforcing fencing, adjusting grazing practices or removing a specific problem animal.

In Saskatchewan, several predator species are known to prey on livestock, particularly young or vulnerable animals. Coyotes are the most common, often targeting calves and lambs, especially during birthing seasons. Wolves, though less frequently encountered, can cause significant losses, particularly in areas near forested regions or during the grazing season. Black bears and cougars also pose risks in some areas, especially to sheep and young livestock, with attacks often occurring near wooded areas or in pastures lacking human activity. Ravens, while typically scavengers, can become active predators — occasionally causing severe injuries and preying on young animals.

1.1 Coyotes

Coyotes are one of the most common and adaptable predators found in southern Saskatchewan. They thrive in a wide range of environments, from open prairie and farmland to wooded areas and even in urban centres. However, they are wary of anything new in their territories, including food. They often avoid or approach unfamiliar objects or changes in their surroundings with hesitation until they become accustomed to them.

Coyotes are territorial and resident groups usually consist of a breeding pair and their offspring, occupying small, mutually exclusive territories, varying in size depending on food availability and habitat. Near ranches, coyotes that have access to deadstock during the winter will often stay for the summer, attracting other individuals. Defense of territories, often by the breeding pair, increases during the spring and summer. Transient coyotes—often younger, senior, or injured individuals—have larger, overlapping territories and tend to avoid resident groups.

Coyotes eat mostly small animals, such as rodents, birds, frogs, snakes and insects, but also scavenge and hunt the young and sick of larger animals, including livestock, especially during the birthing and grazing seasons. They

typically hunt alone or in small groups, using stealth and speed to approach and attack. There is usually evidence of a struggle at the kill site, including drag marks, broken vegetation and blood. They target the legs and flanks, but also the shoulders and neck or face, resulting in bruising and bite marks at these sites. Roaming dogs will also sometimes attack and kill livestock. These events can be difficult to distinguish from coyote attacks. One defining difference is that dogs tend to maul the prey indiscriminately.

When coyotes feed, they often start with the hind quarters, moving towards the front, breaking up and chewing on the leg bones and chewing on the tips of the ribs. They may also eat the stomach and intestines. They will peel back the hide from the meat, often leaving it mostly intact with multiple large holes. Scat and/or urine will likely be found all over the kill site. If given enough time, coyotes will eat the entire carcass, disarticulating it and spreading it across a 20-metre or larger radius from the kill site.

Table 1. Differences between coyote, wolf and domestic dog attacks on livestock

Coyotes	Wolves	Dogs
Presence of tooth puncture in the throat area	Damage to head, neck, back, flanks or hindquarters	Damage to entire body
Damage to legs, flanks, throat or neck area	Extensive injuries	More than one animal injured or killed
No signs of mutilation	Crushed skulls or severed spines	Animals show sign of nervousness
Herds are usually calm	Ribs chewed to vertebrae	Mutilation is normal
Feeding begins in flank area, return to feed on carcass and kill again	May totally consume a carcass in one feeding	Usually no sign of feeding on the carcass

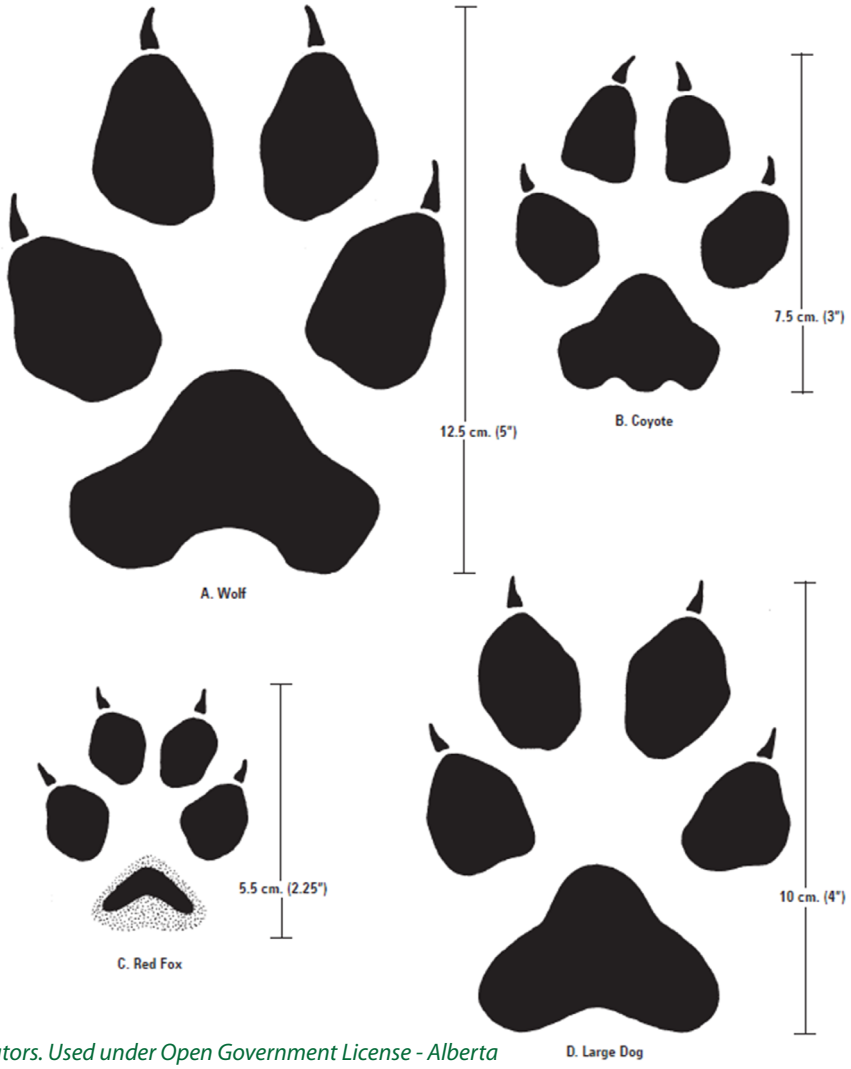

Figure 1. Footprints of canid predators. Used under Open Government License - Alberta

1.2 Wolves

Wolves are primarily found in the forested regions of Saskatchewan, including the parkland, but have been seen passing through the grasslands on occasion. Unlike coyotes, which are more adaptable and often found near urban centres, wolves prefer remote areas. For a portion of the year, wolves also hunt in coordinated packs, allowing them to take down prey much larger than themselves, such as moose, elk and deer. Wolves typically chase and attack livestock in a similar manner to coyotes, targeting the head, neck, back, flanks, and hindquarters. Injuries are more extensive than those from coyotes with massive tissue damage. Carcasses can be disarticulated and spread over a large area, also similar to coyotes. You may find crushed skulls, severed spines, ribs chewed to the vertebrae and an intact hide with multiple large holes. Scat and/or urine may be found all over the kill site.

1.3 Black Bears

Black bears in Saskatchewan are primarily found in the northern forests, however their range does extend south into the Aspen Parkland and remnant forests and valleys, such as the Touchwood Hills, Moose Mountain Provincial Park and the Qu'Appelle and South Saskatchewan River valleys. Treed cover is crucial for them, though seasonal movement can be influenced by the availability of their preferred food sources, including everything from insects to grass, berries, fruits, small animals and occasionally larger animals like livestock. When natural food sources are scarce or during certain times of the year, including the fall in preparation for hibernation, bears will turn to whatever other food sources are more readily available, which is when they can become a problem for producers if attractants are accessible.

Bear predation is typically the work of a single adult. Bears kill with bites to the head, top of the shoulders, withers and spine. There is often massive damage at the point of attack. They open the body cavity and consume internal organs first, especially the liver and other vital organs, followed by the hindquarters. Lactating females' udders are also preferred. Similar to coyotes and wolves, bears commonly peel back the hide from the meat, often leaving it mostly intact with multiple large holes. Scat and/or urine may also be found all over the kill site. If a kill occurs in an open area, the bear may hide the carcass by dragging it into nearby brush or forest and cover it with leaves, grass or soil, returning periodically to feed.

1.4 Cougars

Cougars can be found in the same forested and parkland regions as wolves and black bears, as well as in the Cypress Hills of southwest Saskatchewan. These elusive animals prefer rugged terrain with dense cover – such as coulees and river valleys – which provide ideal conditions for stalking prey.

Cougars are solitary hunters that rely on stealth, strength and surprise. They typically ambush their prey, often deer, elk, or moose, by pouncing from a concealed position and delivering a powerful bite to the head, neck or spine to crush the skull or windpipe or break the neck. Attacks can be unpredictable and may result in multiple kills over a short period. Cougars begin feeding by plucking fur from the hide and chewing a clean entry point into the carcass, rather than tearing it open like other predators. They prefer to eat the organ meats first and often cover carcasses with soil, leaves or other debris to return and feed later. Other signs of cougar predation include large tracks and claw marks.

Preventative Measures to Protect Livestock

It is far easier to prevent livestock predation before it begins than it is to stop it after it has started. Preventative measures such as predator-resistant fencing, guardian animals, temporary deterrents and targeted removal can all be used to discourage and minimize predation. It is best to implement these as early as possible, as predators may challenge their effectiveness to find weak spots they can exploit. Some effective preventative options include:

- Proper deadstock disposal is crucial to prevent attracting predators and reducing potential livestock losses. Coyotes that have access to deadstock during the winter will often stay for the summer, potentially breeding in the area. Use burial, composting or rendering and secure carcasses from access to predators during storage.
- Remove or secure all attractants such as afterbirth, garbage and pet food out of reach of all predators. Eliminate junk piles that may attract prey species and subsequent predators into close proximity with your livestock. Feed for livestock should also be stored in areas inaccessible to deer and elk to prevent them from congregating around your yard, further attracting predators.
- Housing vulnerable livestock (e.g., sick, newborn) in secure buildings or pens near areas of human activity is one of the most effective ways of protecting your livestock, especially for smaller operations. Night penning, in which livestock are housed close to the yard overnight, can also reduce exposure. This is particularly effective if buildings and pens are located away from tall brush that provides cover for predators.
- Implement grazing practices that promote high stocking densities and frequent moves to greener grass, reducing individual vulnerability and encouraging herd vigilance and protective behaviours in livestock.
- Watering sites, where livestock may be less vigilant, should be placed near human activity and away from steep, brushy, or muddy areas that provide cover for predators.
- Avoid pasturing near known predator dens or wildlife trails.

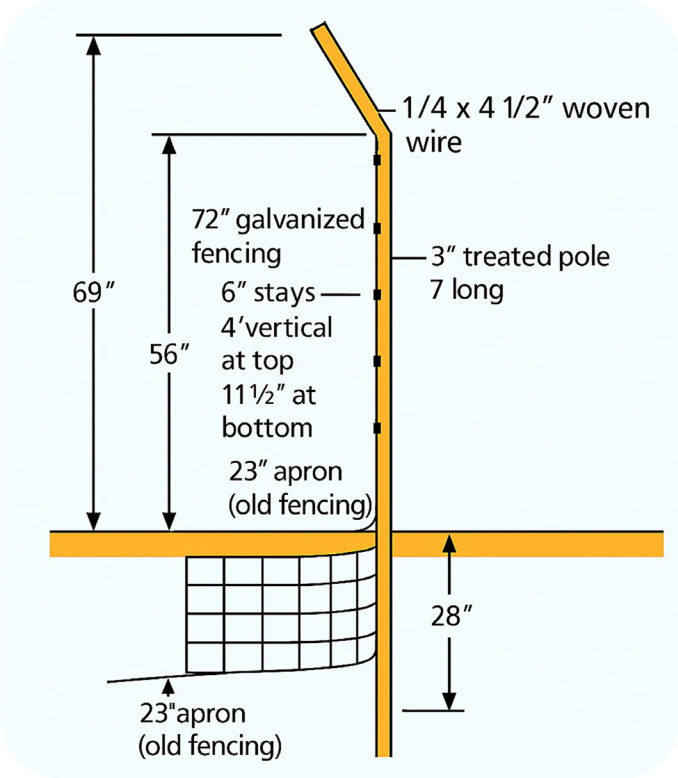

Figure 2. Fence with woven wire apron underground.

Regularly monitoring livestock, especially during high-risk periods, can help detect problems early. Livestock that are being harassed by predators act differently – they may be more vocal, easily startled or reluctant to graze. Injuries or pulled hair/wool can be signs of hunting attempts. Pay special attention to newborn and compromised (e.g., sick, lame, heavily pregnant) animals, as these are targeted by some predators.

When predation does occur, identify the predator species by examining the carcass and the kill site. Note the date, time and location of each event to reveal patterns such as which pastures are more vulnerable or what time of year attacks are most common. Scout the surrounding area for entry points, such as hair on fences, digging under barriers or tracks in soft soil or snow. Evaluate why existing prevention measures failed. This could be due to absent guard animals, malfunctioning equipment or a particularly persistent predator. Reinforce your current defenses where possible and finally determine whether the predator needs to be removed through legal and ethical means. By staying alert, choosing the tools that work best for your operation and keeping track of what you see, you can reduce the impact of predation and protect your livestock more effectively.

2.1 Predator-Resistant Fencing

Predator-resistant fencing can be used to secure vulnerable livestock when needed. To be effective, fence design must address the physical capabilities and behaviours of the predators in your area. A well-constructed fence should prevent animals from passing through, crawling under or climbing over. Some details to consider prior to constructing your fence include:

- Level terrain should be selected and unstable areas like ravines and creeks avoided. A wide, straight path allows for easier construction and maintenance
- Fence height is a major consideration—some predators can jump over fences as high as six feet and climb much higher. Predators may use corner braces as climbing aids, so minimizing these features is important as well. Overhead obstructions like corner shields and overhangs made of woven wire with tight vertical spacing extending outward from the fence have proven particularly effective.
- Predators may push or dig underneath the fence. The bottom wire should be placed close to the ground with sufficient tension to prevent predators from pushing underneath. Woven wire aprons secured to the ground or buried at least six inches are effective at reducing their digging success.
- Gates must be as secure as the fence itself, with tight spacing and minimal ground clearance to prevent entry.
- Numerous studies have evaluated fence designs for predator exclusion, with varying results. Two permanent designs—nine-wire electric fences and woven wire mesh fences—stood out for their effectiveness and affordability. While not specifically tested against all predator species, these designs are expected to work against larger animals like bears and wolves, though they may be less effective against smaller, more agile predators.

2.1.1 Nine-wire Electric Fence

Electric fences are adaptable, economical and relatively easy to maintain. These fences deliver a shock when an animal completes the circuit by touching a charged wire and either a grounded wire or the ground itself. The intensity of the shock depends on the conductivity of the path back to the energizer. Grounding systems must be properly installed and maintained, with ground rods placed at regular intervals to ensure consistent shock delivery. Vegetation, debris and poor soil conditions can interfere with conductivity, so fence lines must be kept clear and level to maintain effectiveness.

Electric fencing should be constructed using 11 to 14 gauge high tensile steel wire. The fence energizer should be rated to at least 0.7 joules and generate at least 6,000 volts. Nine strands of alternating hot and grounded wire should be used, with the top and bottom wires being both hot. The bottom wire should be placed a maximum six inches above the ground, and spacing between the lower wires should be the same. To further reduce the potential for digging, a woven wire apron can be added. Gates must fit tightly to the fence and meet the same specifications.

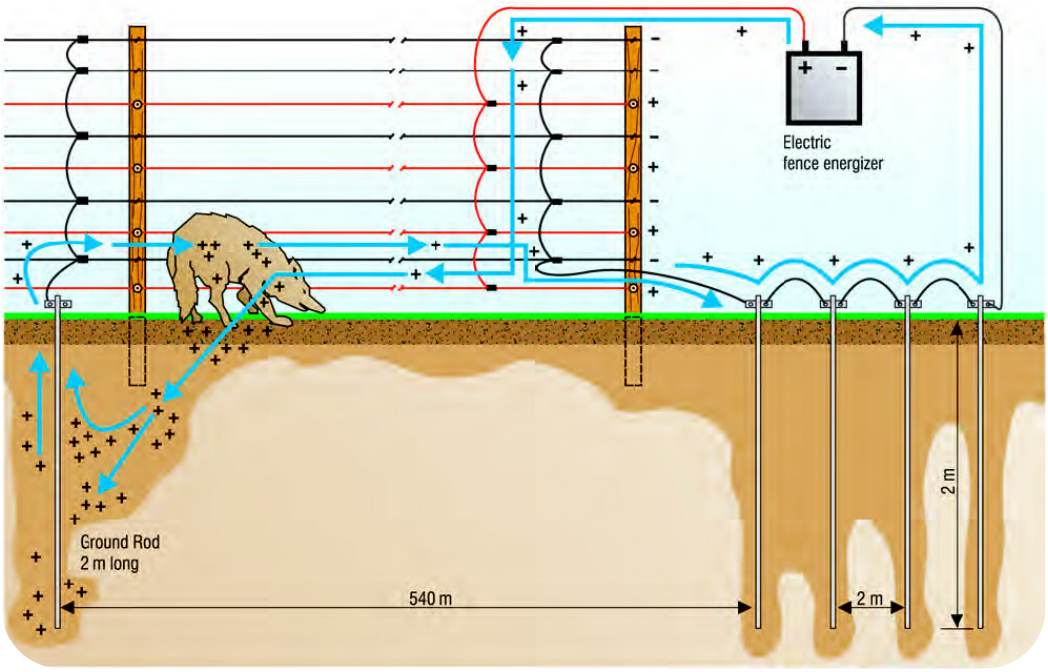

Figure 3. Current flow through a nine-wire electric fence. Used under the Open Government License – Alberta

2.1.2 Woven Wire Mesh Fence

Woven wire fencing can be an effective tool for keeping predators out of livestock areas, especially when designed with tight spacing and proper height to prevent animals from squeezing through, crawling under or jumping over.

Its rigid structure and small mesh openings make it particularly useful for deterring predators, but it is best suited for securing smaller pastures or high-risk areas such as birthing pens. In larger or more open grazing systems, woven wire fencing can inadvertently trap wildlife that enters the pasture, potentially leading to stress or injury for both the wildlife and the livestock. To balance predator control with wildlife safety, producers should consider using woven wire fencing strategically and in combination with other deterrents or fencing types that allow for safe wildlife movement in broader landscapes.

Installed woven wire should stand at least four feet tall, with wire spacing no larger than four inches, especially near the bottom to prevent predator entry. Use 11 to 14 gauge high-tensile smooth wire woven panels, as thinner wires are more easily bent. Posts should be spaced 16.5 feet apart. Panels should be secured to the outside of the posts and tight to the ground. A smooth high tensile or barbed wire can be placed at ground level to deter digging and two additional smooth wires can be added above the woven wire to reach a total height of six feet, with the option to electrify one for added protection. A woven wire apron should extend at least 16 inches from the bottom of the fence and be secured to the ground to prevent predators from lifting it and digging under. Gates must fit tightly to the fence and meet the same height, ground apron and top wire specifications.

2.2 Guardian Animals

Livestock producers are increasingly turning to guardian animals, such as dogs, donkeys and llamas, to deter predators. Dogs are preferred for protecting multiple animals in larger areas, while donkeys and llamas work best individually in smaller, more visible pastures. Additional information on guardian animals can be found in the Hunters Guide and Trappers Guide on ***saskatchewan.ca***.

2.3 Temporary Deterrents

Human presence is one of the most effective deterrents for predators, as most are wary of humans and will avoid them as long as attractants are inaccessible. Varying the timing of daily wellness checks increases unpredictability in human presence. When possible, consider using a human shepherd or simulate human activity by moving a parked vehicle around the pasture.

Short-term deterrents such as fladry, lights, noise devices, scarecrows and combinations thereof can temporarily disrupt predator behaviour, but their effectiveness is generally limited to less than two months. These methods rely on a predator's natural fear of unfamiliar stimuli, which triggers a startle or flight reaction that interrupts their hunting patterns. However, predators quickly habituate to these deterrents, with the rate of habituation varying by species and individual. Despite their short-lived impact, these techniques are useful in specific situations, such as immediately following a predation event, in high-risk pastures or during vulnerable periods like birthing and weaning. When used strategically, they can provide temporary relief while longer-term solutions are implemented.

Fladry

Fladry is a traditional predator deterrent method that involves hanging flags from a rope suspended about 1.5 feet above the ground, typically around a pasture or farm. Originally used in Eastern Europe to direct wolves into traps, fladry has shown effectiveness in preventing wolf predation for up to two months, particularly in controlled or high-risk environments. Field trials in Alberta and Michigan demonstrated its ability to keep wolves out of cattle and sheep pastures, though its effectiveness against coyotes is minimal, with coyotes often crossing the barrier within weeks. Electrified fladry—where flags are hung from electrified wire—has proven to be significantly more effective than standard fladry, though it requires consistent maintenance to remain functional. Construction requires careful attention to detail, including proper flag spacing, secure attachment and adequate support posts. Maintenance is critical, as failures in setup or upkeep such as broken lines or vegetation interference can quickly compromise its effectiveness.

Sound and Light Deterrents

Sound and light deterrents have been used to temporarily frighten predators and reduce access to livestock areas, but their effectiveness is generally short-lived. Radios playing at night and recordings of distress calls—especially when combined with predator sounds—can trigger a startle response in animals. These methods have been more successful with birds than carnivores, with applications in places like airports and power stations.

More advanced deterrents such as the Electronic Guard, which randomly activates combinations of light and sound, have shown longer effectiveness. When multiple units are used and repositioned regularly, they provide protection for up to 103 days in small pastures. However, these devices are best suited for small to mid-sized groups in intensively managed paddocks and their random activation may reduce effectiveness over time as predators learn to ignore them. Triggered activation based on predator behaviour could improve results.

A major drawback of these systems is the potential disturbance to livestock and guardian dogs.

2.4 Targeted Removal

When preventative measures fail, targeted lethal control is most often needed to remove the persistent predator(s), which is often more effective than removing animals indiscriminately. Broad population control often fails because it doesn't address the learned behaviour of hunting livestock and removing animals can increase predation by disrupting packs and letting new, possibly more aggressive individuals move in. A more efficient approach is through targeted removal of the individual(s) responsible for the livestock losses, which requires fewer animals to be killed and minimizes disturbances to the surrounding predator populations, promoting a more balanced and resilient agricultural landscape.

Producers in Saskatchewan can manage coyote predation using both shooting and trapping. In the Southern Fur Conservation Area (SFCA), coyotes may be hunted year-round without a license when using a firearm. A fur license is required to trap coyotes. Harvest activities must follow all hunting and trapping regulations. Trappers must also secure landowner permission for all trap sets, including additional permission for sets placed within 500 metres of occupied residences or livestock facilities in the SFCA. More information can be found in the most recent versions of the Hunters Guide and Trappers Guide.

Producers may legally shoot wolves, black bears and cougars on their property to protect livestock without requiring a hunting license. Any wolf, cougar or black bear killed under these circumstances must be reported to the Ministry of Environment. Legal methods include firearms and approved traps or snares, provided all hunting regulations are followed.

3. Assistance

The Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation's Wildlife Damage Compensation Program reimburses producers for livestock, fowl or specialty animals injured or killed by predators. It provides up to 100 per cent compensation for confirmed deaths, up to 80 per cent of veterinary costs on injured animals, and up to 50 per cent of losses if predation is suspected but unconfirmed. No payment is issued without evidence. Eligible predators include, but not limited to, coyotes, wolves, bears, cougars, lynx, foxes, bobcats and birds of prey. Compensation values are based on market data, with minimums set for some species and registered animals paid at 1.5 times their commercial value. Producers must claim farm income or expenses for the animals and provide proof, such as photos, carcasses, and receipts.

Where predation problems persist, the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation (SCIC) may hire a predation specialist to assess and resolve the issue. These specialists are skilled hunters and trappers who can remove problem animals and provide advice on preventing future attacks. SCIC determines suitability, arranges permits and requires a farm visit and signed waiver before work begins. Producers must follow recommended predator control measures and maintain good livestock practices; failure to do so can result in denial of future services or compensation. To register a claim, contact your SCIC office promptly, leave carcasses and kill sites intact, take photos and keep veterinary receipts for injured animals.

For more information on predation management, please contact:

Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture
1-866-457-2377
ag.info@gov.sk.ca

Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation – Predation Compensation Program
https://www.scic.ca/wildlife-damage/program-overview/predation-compensation
1-888-935-0000
customer.service@scic.ca

For more information on Saskatchewan's wildlife regulations relevant to predators, including hunting regulations, please contact:

Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
saskatchewan.ca/environment
1-800-567-4224
centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca

To report dangerous wildlife, please contact our 24-hour, seven-day-a-week TIPP (Turn In Poachers and Polluters) service at 1-800-667-7525.