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## Do Predator Culls Really Save Livestock?



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By: [s.e. smith](#) | October 27, 2016  
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Every year — over the bodies of dead mountain lions, wolves, coyotes and bears — officials assure the public that “culls” are necessary for [livestock protection](#). They often frame this euphemistically phrased “predator control” as an unfortunate decision, but one backed with science and a thorough understanding of predator dynamics.

It turns out, though, that those officials may be full of baloney.

A new study published in “Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment” suggests that the research they’re relying on [isn’t actually all that great](#). Lead researcher Adrian **Treves** of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has some questions about how those studies were conducted — and whether their results are really all that applicable.

You’ve probably heard the logic: Ranchers keeping sheep, cattle and other livestock begin losing members of their herds to “problem” predators, so officials step in to kill some of the offenders in order to protect the financial interests of the agricultural community.

As is often the case, humans win out. In September, for example, Norway announced a [dramatic wolf cull](#) to protect its extremely large sheep population.

Earlier this month, predators in Nevada actually got a [reprieve](#) as a result of a lawsuit challenging the methodology of science used by Wildlife Services, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture — not to be confused with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

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So is it true?

To know the answer to that question, we need research — and a lot of it. But it's not enough to simply conduct a study, argues **Treves**, who performed a meta-analysis of over 100 studies on the subject.

**Treves** was particularly concerned about the lack of randomization. While the it can be challenging to implement such a process in the field, it provides vitally necessary information.

In this case, the question is whether removing predators really has a substantive impact on livestock losses, or whether leaving predators intact yields a similar result.

**Treves** refers to this as a “gold standard,” and it's one of the underlying tenets of a huge variety of research methodologies. After all, if doing nothing has the same result, it's pretty clear that there's another cause for the problem that researchers are trying to solve.

But the flaws **Treves** raises aren't just about randomization.

He also found issues with how studies were constructed, from the number of animals in the pastures selected for research to a lack of pre-cull research and subsequent follow-up monitoring.

**Treves** is not alone in questioning whether culls really work, as researchers have raised concerns about [increases in predator numbers](#) following culls, as well as a [spike in predation](#).

As humans expand their territory, these are dilemmas that will arise even [more frequently](#), making it critical to use robust scientific methods to examine the interactions between predators and livestock.

[Critics](#) of **Treves**' findings — including some of the researchers he challenged — argued that his own work had flaws, such as a failure to consult with outside experts and misleading evaluations of some of the studies involved.

This sort of peer discussion only makes scientific research stronger. It highlights the fact that multiple studies — including literature reviews like this one — are necessary to explore and verify information.

**Treves**' work isn't designed to be a definitive study, but hopefully it will open the door to more thoughtful study construction in the future, as well as promote more careful examination of previous research on the topic.

Just because certain research superficially confirms assumptions — “killing predators reduces livestock losses” — doesn't mean that those findings are the correct or final conclusion.

*Photo credit: [brainfreezer](#)*

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## DEMAND NORWAY STOP MASS SLAUGHTER OF ITS ENDANGERED WOLF POPULATION

**AUTHOR:**

Tracey Dengate &amp; Julie Jones

**TARGET:**Prime Minister of Norway Erna Solberg  
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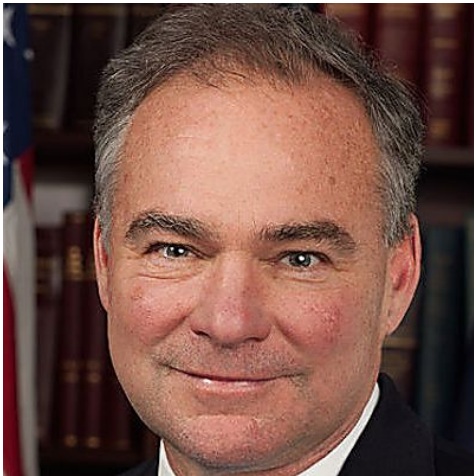
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Patricia H. 17 minutes ago  
Mark Turner, yep! Including himself...

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Mark Turner 28 minutes ago  
The biggest killing machine is man and he is the greatest threat to all species.

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Linda W. 2 hours ago



Men have always hunted and they want to continue. Any excuse will do.

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**Ama A.** 2 hours ago

I'm not even going to both commenting. It will turn into a short novel. Thank you

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**Mark Donner** 3 hours ago

Wildlife Services is without any doubt a criminal organization that is covertly assaulting the public. They are guilty of racketeering, accepting bribes, along with a host of felonies which includes destruction of protected environments, illegal killing of endangered species and pets, and the murders of children.

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**Magdalen B.** 3 hours ago

Probably not.

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**Peggy B.** 4 hours ago

TYFS

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**Larry McDaniel** 4 hours ago

Thank you

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**Maxine Stopfer** 4 hours ago

This is such a sad situation. Killing all those beautiful animals just to give hunters another reason to go out and slaughter. Farmers and ranchers should be ashamed of themselves.

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**Marcia Geiger** 5 hours ago

No, but it gives hunters the right of shoot real wild animals!

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