

## **2 MARCH 2007**

### **'Domestic' Wolf Killed Sheep**

An elusive predator that killed more than 120 sheep in eastern Montana last year was a 'domestic' wolf, and if its owner can be found, that person would be liable for the damages, state wildlife officials said Wednesday.

DNA testing at two labs determined the wolf, which was killed on a ranch east of Jordan last November, was the product of "human-manipulated breeding in a domestic, captive situation," according to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The animal had genetic material from wolves in the Great Lakes region, the lower 48 states and Alaska, tests showed.

"You just don't see that Heinz 57 hodgepodge in wild wolves," Carolyn Sime, head of the state's wolf program, said Wednesday.

But it's unclear where the animal came from.

"In the absence of any permanent markings on this animal, we have no way to trace it back to its owner," Sime said. "That part of the mystery will remain unresolved unless somebody comes forward."

The 106-pound male caused a stir for months in Garfield and McCone counties, where it traveled widely and periodically preyed on sheep. Reports of depredations began in December 2005 and lasted until July of last year.

The predator eluded trackers until last fall, when its footprints were spotted in deep snow. Federal agents with Wildlife Services shot and killed it from the air on Nov. 2.

"This individual displays classic characteristics of being a domestic wolf," Dyan Straughan, a forensic scientist at the National Forensics Laboratory, said in a statement.

Other characteristics, including its orange color, small foot size, long claws and teeth that were in relatively good condition, also indicated the wolf wasn't from the wild.

Montana law requires that any captive, domestic or hybrid animal that is more than half wolf be permanently tattooed and registered with Fish, Wildlife and Parks and that any escaped animal be reported. Financial liability for property damage caused by such animals is the responsibility of the owner, state officials said.

Since the law passed in 1985, 332 tattoo registration numbers have been issued and 60 people have registered captive or hybrid wolves, Sime said.

The domestic wolf shot in Garfield County didn't have any tattoos. Tracing its origins might be difficult because the domestic wolf business can be hard to track.

"It's a closeted industry that's hard get a handle on," Sime said.  
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