

Care & Share program gives recreationists a head's up about co-existing with sheep, cattle grazing on public lands

By Steve Stuebner

The Care & Share education campaign is gaining momentum as the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission uses multi-pronged outreach methods to spread the word on how recreationists can co-exist with livestock grazing on public lands.

Trailhead signs, news media outreach and a new cutting-edge web site let recreationists know where they may encounter sheep and cattle near popular trails.

"Idaho's rangelands are a great playground and a very important work place," says Gretchen Hyde, Executive Director of the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission. "Most recreation users have no problem seeing livestock, but they're kind of confused about what they're supposed to do when they have that interaction."

Care & Share information signs at trailheads talk about the importance of:

- Closing gates after you pass through.
- What to do if you encounter domestic sheep and guard dogs in particular.
- Leashing pets before you encounter livestock and guard dogs.

The Care & Share education campaign is a partnership between the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission (IRRC), the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the Idaho Department of Lands. The campaign theme is: Care for Idaho's rangelands and share them respectfully with others. IRRC takes the lead in distributing trailhead kiosk signs to state and federal land managers, and partners like the BLM and the Forest Service, along with ranchers, assist in making timely Care & Share information available to local communities.

John Kurtz, Outdoor Recreation Planner for the BLM in the Shoshone District in south-central Idaho, explains how the system works in the Wood River Valley near Hailey, Ketchum and Sun Valley.

"We're at the Clear Creek Trailhead about 3.5 miles west of Hailey," Kurtz explains. "The sheep are in here a couple of times per year. They come up the road and graze into the Bullion drainage. As they come through the area, what we do is provide information at the trailhead to notify people that sheep will be in the area so they know what's going on and what to expect when they're out there riding or hiking on the trail system.

"We put a start date and a stop date and provide contact information, so we can provide answers or feedback if the public has questions."



Great Pyrenees guard dogs that protect sheep herds from predators view domestic dogs as potential threats ... be sure to leash dogs when hiking through sheep.

Similar Care & Share signage with information about sheep coming through recreation areas is posted at many trailheads in the Wood River Valley, as well as in the South Hills in the Sawtooth National Forest near Twin Falls, the Payette National Forest near McCall and Caribou-Targhee National Forest near Soda Springs.

In the Boise area, IRRC issues press releases to the news media each spring to notify recreationists that domestic sheep are moving through, usually in late April or early May. The press releases often capture media coverage by local TV stations to help spread the word to recreationists.

The primary issues are to explain to the public how to interact with sheep guard dogs and the importance of keeping pets on a leash. Ranchers use Great Pyrenees guard dogs as a non-lethal method of guarding sheep herds from predators such as wolves, coyotes and foxes.

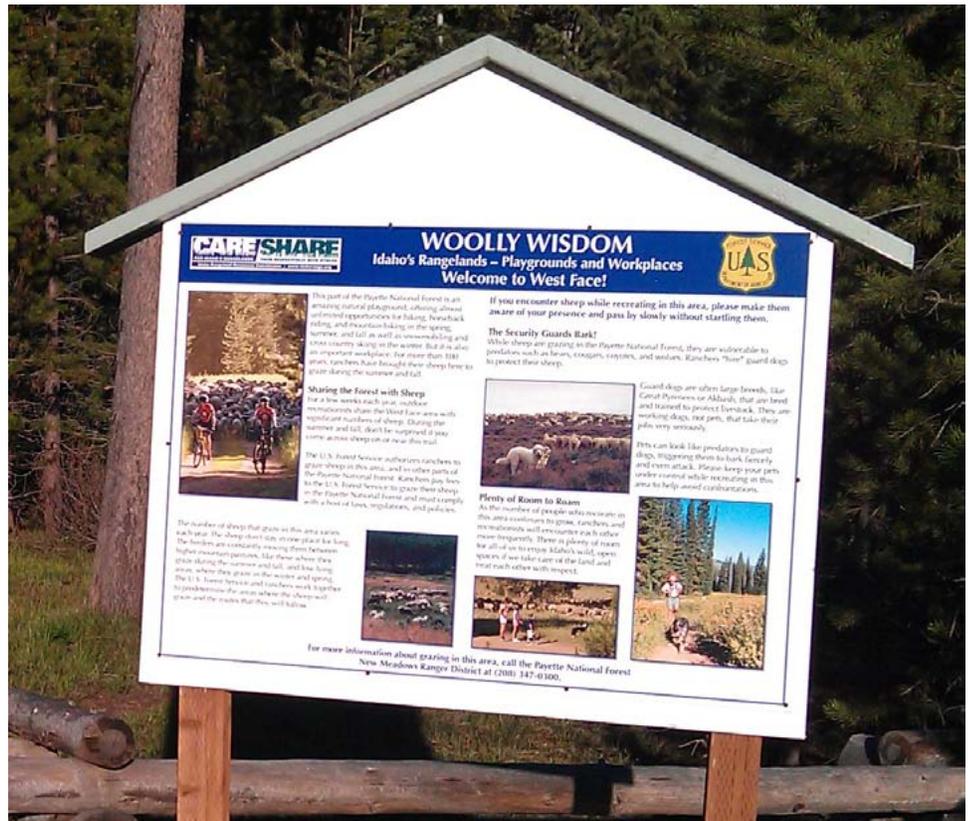
Hyde points out that the guard dogs are there to protect the sheep. "Unfortunately, when recreationists have their pet with them, the guard dogs consider that a predator," she says. "By keeping your pet on a leash, the guard dogs won't see the dog as a threat. We don't want to see any negative thing happen to somebody's pet."

Mountain bikers can avoid conflicts with guard dogs by getting off their bikes and walking through the sheep. Jim Giuffre, an active mountain biker in Boise, says he saw a media report instructing mountain bikers to dismount from their bikes, and gave it a try on a foothills ride.

"I got up early on a Saturday morning and read an article about sheep in the foothills," Giuffre says. "And they talked about the Great Pyrenees guard dogs and how to act and behave around them whether you're hiking or biking in the foothills. I'm relating this story to my son, Jess, and he's following me up Corrals Trail, and he's kind of pooh-poohing it. We dropped down the draw and sure enough, there were hundreds of sheep out there, and I tell Jess the story again, and I say, 'I'm getting off my bike.'"

"And then two giant Great Pyrenees guard dogs come running down at us and come within 10 feet of us ... and then they stopped, looked at us, and went away. And Jess and I looked at each other and went, 'It worked!'"

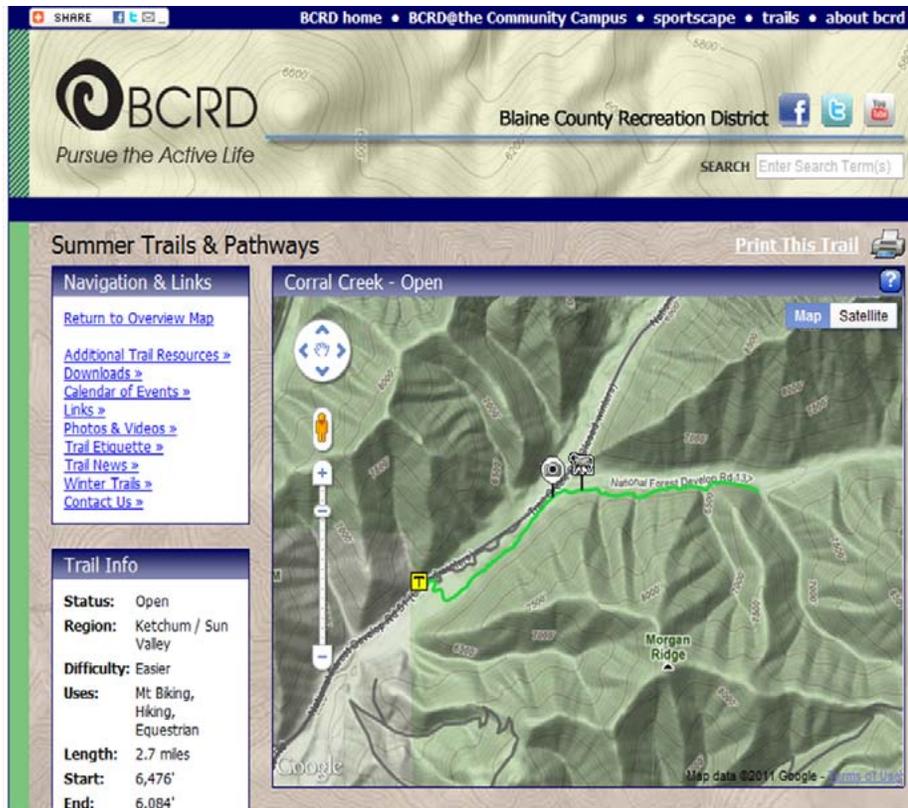
Kurtz says Giuffre did the right thing. "If you get off your bike, talk to the dogs, let them know you're human, you should be OK," he says. "But don't try to outrun the dogs, or ride through a group of sheep quickly, because that will do nothing but antagonize the dogs to actually come after you."



Care & Share signage gives recreationists tips on how to act around guard dogs and domestic sheep herds in the Payette National Forest near McCall.

Kurtz has worked with the Blaine County Recreation District to take the Care & Share outreach program to a new level. Recreation District officials blended sheep turnout dates with public trails information on a new web site so people can see which trails might be affected at a glance.

"The idea here is for people to see in advance what they're going to see out on the trail," says Greg Martin, Wood River Trails Coordinator for the Blaine County Recreation District. "If they want to see sheep, here's where you can find them. Or, if they don't want to go through a band of sheep and run into guard dogs, then perhaps you pick a different trail for that day."



The web site, <http://bcrd.org>, is funded through a grant from the BLM. The site helps provide timely information about trail etiquette, trail status in the spring when conditions can be snow-bound and muddy, and livestock grazing.

With more than 400 miles of recreation trails in the Wood River Valley, recreationists have many options to choose from. "That's the great thing about the Wood River Valley -- there's so many trails and so many opportunities, and the sheep are in areas for such a small amount of time, in one drainage or another, so you can sit at home and check out the web site, find out where the sheep are and avoid them altogether," Kurtz says.

The Blaine County Recreation District has a new trails web site that includes information about where recreationists may encounter sheep and guard dogs in various trail locations during the summer. See <http://trails.bcrd.org>

Billy Olson, owner of the Power House Pub and Bike Fit Studio in Hai-ley, likes the idea of being able to find out where the sheep herds are on a

web site. His bike shop and restaurant has Wi-Fi, and riders can find out where to go while they're having a fresh meal. "It's always a surprise when you see sheep," Olson says. "If we can find out where they are ahead of time, it's pretty helpful. I feel like the sheep guys are trying to stay out of our way, so if we can work together a little bit, we can avoid those conflicts. That's good, really good."

Hyde says the multi-pronged educational and outreach efforts through the Care & Share program in southern Idaho seem to be working. "We've seen a vast reduction in the number of complaints and the negative interactions just because people are aware that they may run into sheep or cattle when they're out hiking, biking, camping, just enjoying our public lands," she says.

"It's really not about telling people what to do, but to make sure they're aware, and that they have the tools and information to make the choices that minimize that negative impact. We will continue to use multiple outreach methods to spread the word."

For more information about Care & Share, go to www.idrange.org. To see the new Blaine County Recreation District trails web site, go to <http://bcrd.org>.