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Carnivores, Conservation, and Collaboration: The Coproduction of Resilient Working Landscapes

The potential of human-carnivore conflict has driven the development of adaptive strategies within agropastoral social-ecological systems around the world. In the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) are an important social and ecological force where ideological shifts against carnivore extirpation collide with both practical and cultural realities of livestock management for ranchers. This study evaluates the influence of ecologically-linked social networks (social-ecological linkages) and rancher local ecological knowledge on the development and usage grizzly bear conflict mitigation strategies. Agropastoral social-ecological linkages include landowner-led organizations, NGOs, and government agencies and these linkages have worked collaboratively with each other and individual ranchers to reduce grizzly bear conflict potential on the landscape.

Methods

In order to understand the emergence of social-ecological linkages and rancher local ecological knowledge, I conducted interviews with livestock producing ranchers, landowner-led organizations, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. The interview results were analyzed to identify the motivations, challenges, barriers, and efficacy of various conflict reduction strategies. In addition, I was able to gain insight into the influence individual rancher experience has had on the development and utilization of conflict reduction strategies.

Results/Conclusion

The study results indicate that social-ecological linkages and ranchers are coproducing resilient working landscapes which support the existence of both grizzly bears and humans. The expansion of the grizzly bear beyond federally delineated recovery areas and onto livestock producing ranches in the GYE demonstrates to nongovernmental organizations and government agencies around the world that adaptive strategies must be coproduced with local stakeholders in order to sustain both local communities as well as large carnivores on the landscape.