

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A LOOSE COW:

Make a note. If you find cattle or other stock loose in a neighborhood or close to a major road, make a few mental notes. Where exactly did you see the cow? How many cattle did you notice, did they have unusual colors or markings, and what color were the ear tags?

Make a call. If you think you know whom the livestock belong to, you can call the rancher and let them know. If you're not sure, we welcome you to call or email the Methow Conservancy's Agricultural Coordinator -- (509) 996-5873 or alyssa@methowconservancy.org -- and we can pass along your message.

Be kind & patient. Remember to be kind and give the livestock owner the benefit of the doubt -- they did not intentionally let their animals loose. It may take some time for them to drop what they are doing and organize to round up stray cows or fix weak spots in a fence.

Give space. Do not attempt to herd or corral loose animals, unless the rancher explicitly asks you to do so. You may be sending cows in the wrong direction, or preventing them from finding their way home.

Tips for building a wildlife-friendly fence:

- methowconservancy.org/goodneighbor, section on "Living With Wildlife in the Methow Valley"

Map of Okanogan County's stock-restricted areas:

- <https://okanogancounty.org/Commissioners/Cmrs/Stock%20Restricted.htm>

More tips for being a good neighbor to local farms:

- methowconservancy.org/goodneighbor section on "Farms and Agriculture in the Methow Valley"

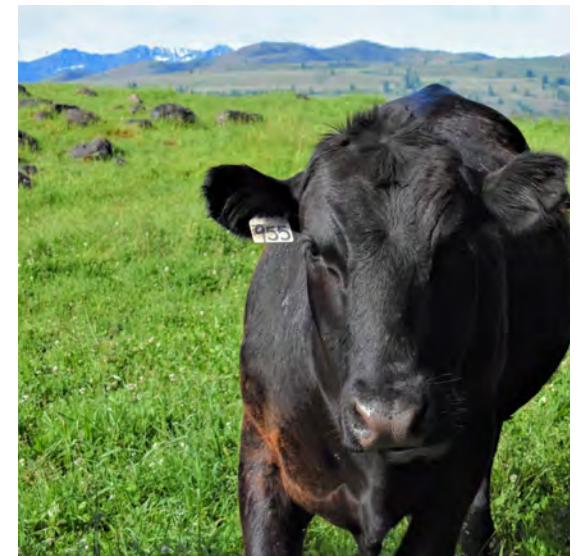
Still have questions? We'd love to help try to answer them!



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Living on the Open Range

Ranching is a key part of the Methow Valley's rich cultural and agricultural heritage. Since the early 1900s, families have been raising cattle on the land. Today, nearly 8,000 privately-owned acres in the valley still support cattle production. These small, family-run ranches keep the land protected from development, ensuring open spaces and corridors for diverse wildlife. The great pastures and hay fields also provide buffers against wildfire, hold carbon in the soil, and provide the working agricultural landscape that we all enjoy.



WHAT DOES OPEN RANGE MEAN?

Under Washington State law RCW 16.24, open range includes areas outside of towns or cities in which it is "lawful to permit cattle, horses, mules, or donkeys to run at large." Counties have the power to designate areas as open range or stock-restricted areas. (See back panel for more on Okanogan County's open range.)

This does not mean that livestock owners allow their animals to wander and graze anywhere on open range. Ranchers are obligated to hold a verbal agreement, lease or permit for the areas grazed by their livestock, but are not required by law to contain them with a fence. However, there are very few situations in which a rancher would graze an area that is not well-fenced. Most ranchers understand the delicacy of maintaining a good relationship with the general public and preventing nuisance, so they actively manage their animals, forage, and fence lines.



However, livestock do have minds of their own, and inevitably animals will escape a fence and stray from the designated grazing area. Late fall, when cattle are coming down from grazing leases at higher elevations is the most common time to find cows on the roads or in your front yard. Sometimes, due to an early storm in the high country, cattle might decide it's time to head home to the ranch before the rancher is prepared to herd them home in an orderly fashion.



FENCING YOUR PROPERTY

A landowner living on the open range who wishes to avoid the nuisance of livestock that escape from grazing areas can fence their property to exclude cattle and other livestock. A temporary, electric fence with some flagging for increased visibility might do the job, especially if livestock are only an issue during limited time periods. If you build a permanent fence, it's important to also consider a design that is safe for local wildlife. (See back panel for more information.)

MEETING CATTLE ON THE TRAIL & THE RULE OF GATES

If you are recreating on public lands, it's likely you will encounter both cattle and gates. The rule of gates is simple: **if you find a gate open, leave it open; if you find a gate closed, close it behind you.** Closing an open gate may cut animals off from their water source. Leaving a gate open could allow animals to leave their designated grazing area, or worse -- escape onto roadways, putting both animals and people in harm's way.

If you encounter livestock on public lands, be respectful of the animals. No matter your opinions about grazing on public lands, never chase or haze livestock. Be sure to put your dogs on leash so they don't injure themselves or the livestock.

