



**MOUNTAIN  
HUMANE**

Trailing  
of the  
Sheep  
Festival



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## **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU COME UPON THE SHEEP AND GUARD DOGS IN THE VALLEY**

It is summer in the Wood River Valley and that means lots of people are heading for the hills to camp, hike, and bike. It is not just outdoor lovers who are heading to higher altitudes. Starting this week, Idaho ranchers are guiding their sheep herds across valleys and streams in the lower elevations of Southern Idaho, over Galena summit and into the Sawtooth Mountains for summer grazing. Many local sheep herders use Great Pyrenees dogs as their “livestock guard dogs” during this migration process. These large, white dogs have been bred for centuries to deter predators and serve as vigilant guardians of the sheep.

It is not uncommon for local outdoor enthusiasts to encounter these dogs, and the herds they protect, while recreating in the Wood River Valley and the Sawtooth Mountains. Several local organizations, including Mountain Humane, Trailing of the Sheep Festival, Blaine County Recreation District (BCRD), and Flat Top Sheep Company are working together to educate the public on what to do if they find themselves face to face with these big guard dogs.

First, it is important for the public to understand that these dogs are raised with the herd of sheep. They create an emotional bond that is so strong that the dog will stay with the flock for its entire life. Their mission is to protect the sheep in every situation, day and night, all year long. The dogs create a protective zone, and if anyone enters this zone you can expect the dogs to start barking. This behavior is their way of saying, “Hey you, over there, I can see you. This is a protected area. You need to move away.”

If you find one of these dogs on its own, the dog is not lost. These dogs roam the same trails in the same territory, doing the same thing, year after year. Flat Top sheep rancher Cory Peavey advises anyone in this situation to leave the dog in place unless it is injured or looks like it really needs help. “They are more than likely in the process of catching up with the herd,” he says. Peavey also advises that you talk to the dog calmly. “Don’t try to pet, feed or establish eye contact. It is best to stand still and let the dog assess you and understand that you are not a threat,” shared Peavey.

People who are recreating in Central Idaho can enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of the sheep and their guard dogs if they keep their distance and leave the dogs to do their job.

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### **Media Contacts:**

**Annie H. McCauley, Executive Director, Mountain Humane** [amccauley@mountainhumane.org](mailto:amccauley@mountainhumane.org), 208.788.4351

**Laura Musbach Drake, Executive Director, Trailing of the Sheep Festival**  
[laura@trailingofthesheep.org](mailto:laura@trailingofthesheep.org), 314.398.2431

**Chris Leman, Trail Coordinator, BCRD**, [cleman@bcrd.org](mailto:cleman@bcrd.org), 208.578.2278

**Cory Peavey, Flat Top Sheep Company**, [flattopsheepcompany@gmail.com](mailto:flattopsheepcompany@gmail.com), 208.481.0444