

Wolf Advisory Group meeting notes

April 24, 2019

Comfort Inn Conference Center
1620 74th Avenue SW
Tumwater, WA 98501

WAG members: Samee Charriere, Tim Coleman, Don Dashiell, Tom Davis, Dave Duncan, Diane Gallegos, Andy Hover, Jess Kayser, Jessica Kelley, Ralph Kratz, Molly Linville, Dan Paul, Lisa Stone, Paula Swedeen

WDFW staff members: Donny Martorello, Steve Pozzanghera, Annemarie Prince, Candace Bennett, Trent Roussin, Rob Geddis, Matthew Trenda, Julia Smith

USFWS: Gregg Kurz

Fish and Wildlife Commission: Jay Holzmilller

Facilitator: Rob Geddis

Welcome and check in

Rob welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the objectives and agenda for the meeting. Goals include identifying protocol changes (if any), refining internal WAG member agreements, and updating everyone on the post delisting planning (if time permits).

Everyone checked in around the room.

Department updates and WAG member questions

Donny provided updates on a number of topics.

WAG membership

There were three vacancies that needed to be filled. The department went through the entire process to bring new members aboard (interviews, etc.). Positions have been offered to two individuals. First one accepted, while the second one is still considering. The third offer has not yet been made.

The department is also ready for reappointment of current members. Wanted to wait for this step until after WAG discusses the process they would prefer for that.

Question

Who does the new member who accepted represent?

Answer

We had openings for at large, environmental, and hunting communities. The new member is at large.

Facilitation

The last conversation talked about what facilitation looks like going forward. The department has sought funding for a third party neutral for WAG. If we don't see that in the budget, it doesn't mean it's not important. It's still a value we have. There are some heavy lifts coming up. We need to

understand what the department's budget will look like, and what our capacity is to draw the money for a third party neutral. We see the need for a third party neutral, but the question is how we get there.

House Bill 2097

Has not been signed right now, but is on its way to the Governor's Office. It has passed the House and Senate.

Comment

Whether you agree or disagree with the bill, it was very impressive to see the process of all sides coming together.

Comment

For our discussion today, it's helpful to know that the bill commits long term funding for proactive nonlethal deterrents. When we think about how we want the protocol to look, knowing that part is a really cool thing.

Comment

The idea of this conflict transformation process is that it changes and grows as we move forward. This started a few months ago with a meeting in the northeast. A group of diverse stakeholders got together and talked about best approaches. That was kind of the start of 2097. If we think about what we're doing in 2019, we have the data sharing program (continued with status quo for the season, with a few new features). We have a small group of folks to work on what that looks like for 2019, and they're currently going back to their groups to do intakes on ideas. It's the same situation with compensation. The theme right now is the indirect compensation model is not being used and could use improvement. It's the same process I described before. There is a small group to discuss options. Everything is on the table in terms of compensation, with a focus on indirect. Once there's agreement on that, we'll start the process for commission approval.

Comment

I think it'll be \$450,000 for nonlethal deterrents. There is intent in the bill for the same amount to be available for Dept. of Agriculture for their work. Remainder of the bill is for new full time staff in northeast Washington.

Dialogue and sharing information amongst researchers;

We feel like we need to do a better job at getting this information out to WAG and the public. That is something we want to improve for this calendar year. Nothing specific yet, but it's something we want to do better. We'll be reaching out to the research entities to see what works best for them. Then we will determine how that works with what we want to do as well.

Comment

It's also making sure that policy makers know what the science is doing as well. So that is both for WAG/public and policy makers.

RFQ for range riders is out as of yesterday (4/23). Please share it so we get a good pool of applicants.

Interagency Wolf Committee meeting

It will be 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Friday. A conference line will be set up for the public. More information to come, as the conference line isn't prepared yet. This group has individuals who

represent federal, state, tribal, and other organizations that deal with wolves in Washington. It's a variety of individuals. We were meeting regularly at first, but lately it's been once every 1-2 years or so. We have quite a few updates for this year, so we'll be bringing those points forward to see how we can further collaborate.

SEPA/EIS

Three ongoing large projects for Washington right now. One is the periodic status review. In October 2018, we filed a CR101 initiating the periodic status review for wolves in Washington. Periodic status review is generally done every five years. The step we're on now is gathering resources to analyze the current state of wolves in Washington. Translocation is the second item. This would be moving wolves from one area of the state to the other. This is subject to change based on what happens in the Legislature this year. The third item is the SEPA process for the post recovery conservation and management. That process will start in September. The reason we're looking at post recovery now is to be proactive and be ready for that change when it does occur. All three of these processes touch the WAG, and we'll be looking for WAG input on all of them. We also want you to inform your communities as we move forward.

Comment

The timeline for these is taking into account the timeline WAG developed last year.

Question

Some people have asked me why these meetings aren't being recorded, either video or even just audio. These meetings are information-rich, and it would be nice to share that with the public.

Question

Are these folks thinking the meeting notes aren't enough?

Answer

Yes

Answer

On that note, we have some new processes we're considering for a few things. One aspect of that is live-streaming our public meetings. So, as an agency, I think we want to reach broader audiences. If that's something you WAG members want to think about, we can talk about retooling/rethinking.

Review WAG member protocol change ideas (from previous meetings and phone calls); begin work identifying any changes for 2019 (with a break in between)

There is a list of protocol change ideas from past meetings and phone conversations. These went out in an email to the wolf mailing list. Rob also received more ideas after the email message went out. Rob proposed getting those ideas on the board first, then going forward from there.

Protocol change topics from previous meetings and phone calls

- Range rider expectations
- Clarify "proactive" (deterrence measures)
- Distance from den/rendezvous sites
- 10-month window
- Multiple depredations – decision criteria still valid?
- Number of depredations before lethal removal
- Reducing investigation costs

- No livestock in high risk areas
- January attacks – do they equal depredation?
- Move “Avoid...sites” to top of deterrence list
- Clarify expectations for all parties (department staff, environmental groups, producers, etc.)
- Better define “event”

Additional ideas from department

- Range rider duties
- Use of applicable nonlethal deterrents
- Different guidelines for different wolf recovery regions

Additional ideas from WAG (today)

- Effects of tribal hunting
 - Estimating populations, recovery goals, etc.
 - Considering whether or not there should be a feedback loop
 - Between department and tribes, and in the way the lethal protocol is implemented
- What happens in a situation where the same pack has had to have lethal removal two or more years in a row?
 - Have a standing meeting
 - If it looks like that pack will have issues again, pull WAG together before grazing season to talk about it and think through issues and consequences

Comment

I feel like we’ve gone straight to changing the protocol when we didn’t discuss what worked and what didn’t work. Donny sent a summary of what worked and didn’t work from the department’s standpoint.

Comment

That’s a good point. WAG shared perspectives on how it went back in December, and the department sent out that summary from the department’s perspective as well.

Comment

I feel like this list of what worked and didn’t work is not sufficient. I feel like it’s hard to make changes if we don’t have a clear understanding of what worked and didn’t. The list is very lacking right now.

Comment

Let’s go through each bullet and reflect on whether it worked or didn’t work.

Range riding

Comment

It worked and it didn’t work. Seemed to work some of the time and not some of the time.

Comment

I don’t know if it’s worked or didn’t work. All of the tools need to work together, so it’s hard to narrow this down.

Comment

I think the what worked and what didn't phrase doesn't work. We need to think about it as what areas could be improved and what that looks like.

Comment

I've always been hung up by the thought that I feel there are two types of range riders. I strongly feel that we cannot expect a young person without experience to understand herd behavior. If that's a requirement of the range riders, then it's not being met. Riding a horse around cattle is one thing, understanding herd behavior is quite a different thing.

Question

Does the first one, riding a horse around cattle, help at all?

Comment

Producers are automatically checking herd behavior, so it's hard to answer that.

Comment

I know we had discussions on definitions when first putting together this protocol. Forcing a producer to have a person ride around with no understanding of the herd is very problematic. That's why we left that kind of loose, so we'd have that flexibility. There are scenarios where riding around cattle works, but with our WDFW range riders, they have a more detailed definition. The two definitions are very different.

Comment

Feels like we're diving into details on range riders, and I don't know if we're at the right time for that.

Comment

From the southeast side of it, we don't have a "range rider" program like the northeast. We hired an employee for the sole purpose of being out in the herd. Has it stopped depredations? No. Has it given us more human presence and awareness of the wolves? Yes. These expectations, and using the term "range rider," how does that fit?

Comment

As a producer, my cattle are behaving different from other producers. If you try to put someone in there who doesn't know cattle behavior, it isn't going to work. The public doesn't necessarily understand that. Range riders will work some, but it's not a cure-all.

Comment

One item would be training, to help with this idea of making sure there's a pool who understand what they need to do to be a good range rider. Does the department provide that? Or is it a non-profit organization item? We'll have to discuss.

I think range riding is a form of human presence, but there are other times of the year (calving season, having folks out at night). When I talk about range riders, I'm not a producer, but my organization has employed people for range riding over the last eight years. We've employed people to spotlight at night, or be present during calving season. Sometimes when we talk about human presence, it doesn't mean range riding. I think we do need to keep that in mind.

Comment

You can't be everywhere all the time. Sometimes you're on one end of the property and coyotes will kill an animal on the other side. When you talk about thousands of acres on an allotment, that's impossible.

Comment

I agree with the separation idea. It's almost like one category is human presence, and the other is range riding. I would hate to put expectations on a "green" range rider when they don't have the experience. That could then reflect poorly on the producer ("Well, your range rider didn't...").

Comment

We know that none of the tools we have are perfect. So I think we want to discuss what tweaks we can make to improve, but also don't get too down on our tools. Right now, range riding is probably the best tool we have right now.

Comment

This list exists because at least one member of the team thinks that is an area that can be improved. Let's assume all of these are areas for improvement, but which ones can be dive into first? So first, did we get all the areas? Then, we can go through and decide where to focus.

Comment

Do we know how many range riders were employed by the department this year?

Comment

There are different types. WDFW contracted range riders, DPCA-Ls, non-profits, and the Department of Agriculture grant. There are also the producers who do it themselves.

Comment

Do we track those year by year?

Comment

Yes, it's definitely grown. We started with one person, and last year we had 15 in the WDFW contracted range rider program alone.

Comment

I think that really will help us answer some of these questions. We can have years of data, etc.

Comment

In the annual report, it said 15 WDFW contracted range riders, while there were 33 DPCA-Ls, but those weren't all range riders?

Comment

Correct. In regard to the DPCA-Ls, they're variable. There is an overlap with non-profits as well.

Comment

Okay. There were at least 18 in the roving contract model, and I know CNW employed two more.

Comment

It's increased significantly since it started.

Comment

I've heard some concerns expressed about verifying range rider locations. Hopefully we can get into that over the next day and a half. Do we need a standard in the protocol for that?

Comment

Might be best to start with what is required now.

Comment

I think I'm blending a little of everything here. When we were meeting with our internal wolf group, there was a discussion on how you improve range riding in that really challenging landscape. There is a part of the landscape that is really challenging. How do we do this better there?

Comment

You realize you only have so much energy to move across that landscape. It's tremendously difficult. How the heck do you monitor that? Having been up there three summers, there are huge gaps, and it's just because of the energy requirements to monitor the landscapes.

Comment

I just wanted to add that how to do better in difficult landscapes could apply to everything, not just range riders.

Comment

How do you prioritize where to spend your time if you don't know what to look for? It seems like you have to be able to tell if the animals are stressed or not. So that seasonal job needs to be attractive enough to get people to come back season after season.

Comment

There are a lot of skills that are not innate skills. Building relationships with producers is extremely important.

Comment

You'd almost be better off hiring someone to do the day to day work while the producers are the ones going out on the landscape.

Comment

I would propose we cross off most of the list and just focus on range riders and "proactive." Time in WAG takes longer than other stuff.

Comment

I disagree. We need to get through all of the list.

Comment

Is there exploration of using drones?

Comment

The timber makes it difficult. There's also the privacy piece, as well as legal and licensing aspects. Drones also scare the cows (you can move cattle with a drone).

Comment

In the interest of time, it seems like in the places where range riding is harder (steep, forested landscapes), are there ways to manage the herd so the cows are in bigger groups? I know it's difficult to adapt to some of these landscapes, but we know it works in other places. This lets the range rider find them more efficiently. There is a lot that goes into it, so I'm hesitant to say it should be a requirement, but at the same time, when there are techniques out there that could help, shouldn't we explore them? I would like to talk about how this can be an approach that is supported and promoted, and is something attractive to folks. How do we come to that sweet spot of encouraging this stuff to happen without forcing it? There is the bit in the protocol now that says producers will work with conflict specialists to determine the best options for nonlethal deterrents. So how do we deal with this?

Comment

Have you ever been in on an initial AOI and heard what the producers have to do?

Comment

Yes.

Comment

The things you're talking about is hard if you're trying to keep cows out of certain pastures due to the contract at the time. I think that's one important part. You're trying to manage cattle on the landscape for the landscape. It can be difficult trying to mix that with what you're suggesting.

Comment

I think that's a really great point. It only works if the range specialist is in on the ground and involved.

Comment

I think there are other things too. Are there creative things that we can do? One thing is having range riders who know where the cows like to go. When I think about WAG, I think this is a good place to try these things. The hardest part of the low-stress livestock handling is that it's a multiple year project. At least that's my understanding. I think it's a good tool, and maybe there are other things we can practice and try. I don't want to lose the good traction we've gained so far.

Comment

Herding is a new term that needs to be thrown out to the group. And now there are a bunch of different variables. If you want to start talking about herding, it can work in some terrains, but all of the other variables have to be discussed as well.

Comment

Just to summarize, we have this idea of two different kinds of range riding. The allotment/pasture setting plays a role as well. Enhanced range riding is the ability to get cows in the right pastures. It's not herding, so to speak, it's more of an idea of multiple pairs (mother/calf) together. This is a range rider who is very experienced, known in the community, pay scale is different, and skillset is a higher bar to be hired. My question, is this gelling together or not?

Comment

We're talking apples and oranges. Keeping pairs together is just good husbandry. What was mentioned was herding. If that's going to be effective, you have to take all your cows and keep them together, and that's done for range management. It can be very efficient in certain terrain. You have

to have enough forage and water to sustain those cows. It is applicable in places, but I don't think it's realistic in other areas. It isn't going to work.

Comment

When I heard that, I didn't hear herding. I heard a much smaller scale.

Comment

I can take 16 dogs and all my friends, and it's hard to drive the cows to one place. You'll find three here, five there, and you won't be done for a long time. You'll find very few producers in our area who are going to allow WDFW staff members to herd cows.

Comment

I feel obligated to say that I use low-stress livestock handling. I feel strongly about how well that works on my landscape. Let's not throw that tool out of the toolbox. There are going to be places in this state where that can be effective. I hope this doesn't have an on/off switch. We need to keep that tool in the toolbox.

Comment

I agree, but we have to define all these different levels.

Comment

Not all range-cons are created equal. All forests have different forest plans. We can't sit here and say we're going to change how state and federal agencies will manage their lands. I haven't heard a single suggestion for protocol change yet. There are lots of ways to do range riding, but I haven't heard a change. It works. It'll be flexible, but it works.

Comment

We need to look at these things that work in other areas and see if they can be adapted to our areas. Other places do have steep grazing allotments where they are adopting this, so it's not just certain areas. What is it about the activity that works? What can we learn from that? That's what I was trying to get to. What works is when you can seek out behavior, and when you can actually be there to put yourself between the wolf and the cow.

Comment

I was told that producers are required to move their cows, not just allow them to move. So in other words, they are herding the cows. I'm not sure exactly how you quantify that, but I was told that. I have a concern about collar data. I'm concerned producers/range riders are going after collar data looking for depredations, rather than watching the cows. I've heard of collaring cattle as well. If you have both sets of data, you then know if they are close together. Seems like that can be a more creative method to use.

Comment

Have we ever told a producer that the range rider they employed didn't do a good enough job, and so that depredation didn't count?

Comment

We had a situation in OPT where we had to prove the documentation of the range rider.

Comment

What I'm trying to look at is protocol change. This is one deterrence method within the protocol to get to where you go to lethal removal. Do we even need to mess with range rider expectations? Do these new techniques need to be in the protocol? Do we need to change the protocol, when these new techniques fit within the scope right now? What is the expectation of change?

Comment

I think there is a sensitivity within WAG, because we don't want to make producers implement deterrence measures that aren't well defined. We don't want to give the "just one more thing" argument to producers. Clarity can put that attitude to bed.

Comment

We need to be careful though, because we'll define ourselves into a box. If people are doing this, they are following the protocol. If they're not doing this to the best of their ability, they're going to lose animals. I know producers who are losing animals who don't say anything because they don't want to be a producer who is "responsible" for lethal removal.

Comment

I think we can look at an innovation grant that would incentivize people to try out ideas that might work. I think we should be investing in innovation.

Comment

Is carcass removal only done by producers and not allowed by range riders? That is something that can be added to the protocol. Anyone should be able to remove carcasses.

Break

WAG resumed the discussion on potential protocol changes.

Comment

A thought before we jump back in. Some of you think range riding needs some guidelines in the protocol, while others think it's okay.

Comment

When we started this, the definition of range riding was someone who monitored the wolf activity in areas where there was conflict with livestock. I think that's where we started. Our question is still how that range rider is going to monitor wolf activity. The livestock owner monitors livestock. The range rider monitors wolves.

Comment

I don't really see that a lot of changes need to be done to the entire protocol. If we have to tweak it, how can we deal with those situations where it didn't work? I don't think it's helpful to change everything. Let's call out the specific areas where it didn't work and add those in.

Comment

I don't know so much about having to define range riding itself. It's a little bit more about the principle of the thing. The nugget of concern I want to get at is that every place is different, and adaptations must be made for those places. However, if you're in a situation where everyone admits it's a difficult landscape, and range riding as practiced isn't working, should the protocol put an obligation on there that some adaptation is made to perfect it. Is that acceptable?

Comment

I think if you're in that situation, I would step back and ask if I'm dealing with the symptom or the cause.

Comment

I hear the point, but I don't think it needs to go in the protocol.

Comment

I don't think it needs to be done that way either. If it's already in the protocol, and there's a circumstance that comes up, we should deal with it then.

Comment

Leave it to the producers to manage the livestock, and leave it to range riders and the staff to monitor wolves. If there's conflicts, maybe wolves should be moved somewhere else.

Comment

I am also uncomfortable with putting that in the protocol. I agree with the sentiment though.

Comment

Right now we have some context around human presence. There are four bullets outlining what that looks like. If we were to add a couple bullets here, what would those look like? We're learning, right, and right now is different than a couple years ago. What would any additions say? Not in the sense of now requiring them, but as a sub-listing under human presence.

Comment

I also don't want to add more requirements in the protocol. Then you can go location by location to see what's required, which is what we're doing already. If there's a question on whether or not the range riding is effective, let's take it up with the producer, not put it in the protocol.

Comment

Can we decouple the range riding portion? A huge problem in our community is what to do in a situation where depredations happen in the same area multiple years in a row.

Comment

I understand where they're trying to get to. But we have to come to some sort of idea that sometimes range riding is not going to work, period. If we look at wolves in the North Cascades, no conflicts. The closer you get to civilization, you're going to have more and more conflicts. So what do you do in that situation? I hear that you have to keep adapting, and keep adapting. But that may not work. You get to the point where you have to wonder what you're going to achieve.

Comment

I think there is an opportunity to have clarity discussions on the mitigation checklist. Making it adaptable for each producer, each area.

Comment

I feel like we're inaccurate in our language. We say human presence, and we've talked about range riding, but in the protocol they're kind of lumped. I think we should recognize that human presence and range riding are different. Human presence doesn't work on large-scale allotments. We're then saying range riding is not just human presence.

Comment

Back to the point that maybe there are places or times when range riding just doesn't work. That poses some really interesting issues for us. I think my suggestion of trying to adapt it if you can was trying to avoid the situation where we are confronted with those issues. If there are adaptations that are tried and could be successful, is that a worse, less desirable thing than being on public land, in an area popular to the public, and there's going to be an argument based around that. If you get in a situation where you have repeated conflict, and there's nothing to be done, then you get a situation where wolves are killed every year, or you have the public saying the livestock should move. The producer doesn't want to move cattle, and the public isn't going to want wolves killed on the same spot every year. I think trying to be adaptable is better than either one of those things. Being adaptable, and putting that in the protocol, seems less negative to me than that situation.

Comment

My concern with that is I would want it spelled out very clearly who decides whether or not something is enough. I would want that really, really clear. That's so we know who to look to for that determination.

Comment

This whole discussion blows my mind. It could be that the wolves are not guilty, and the cattle are not guilty, and we're here trying to treat the symptom without addressing the cause. That has to be recognized. You cannot solve problems by just looking at part of the whole. No good can ever come out of just dealing with the symptoms.

Comment

What are the small tweaks we would think about regardless of the situation? We don't have to reinvent the wheel. The other thing is, there are varying groups of range riders (listed above), and they're already doing things beyond this. The department has expectations, NGOs have expectations, etc. We might be over thinking it a little bit from that perspective.

Comment

Can we move on from this? I know it's a hot topic, but there are things on the list that we may actually be able to talk about and accomplish.

Comment

I'm good with moving on, but I would like to see if people are in agreement about looking at human presence versus range riding. Just something that calls out the differences instead of lumping them together.

Comment

Could Candace write some bullet points on that and bring it tomorrow for us to discuss?

Comment

I can, but I'll reach out to others as well.

Comment

So, in the human presence section of the protocol, the point was made that we kind of lump terms. So now Candace has been asked to form a starting point on what range riding might be, and Trent is doing some points for human presence. Then we can look at separating those terms in the protocol.

Comment

I would like to hear the conservation community views on what the implications are for you all in a situation where there are depredations in the same place every year.

Comment

Years ago, we agreed lethal removal was only one of the tools in the toolbox. So, removing wolves in an area year after year is showing us that the tool isn't working. So what's the next tool we can use? That's kind of a nugget version.

Comment

Does that look any different with public versus private lands?

Comment

For me, no, because the situation/challenge is the same. But that could be different depending on who you ask.

Comment

Thank you for asking that question. To add to the answer, our community in general does put a value on the public lands piece, and we hear it a lot. I've never wanted a different protocol for private land versus public land, but I think there's also a sense that by agreeing to lethal removal, when it's not working, and it's a hot spot, and it's controversial, it puts so much pressure on all of us. So in those cases, lethal removal hasn't stopped depredations. That's really hard on the local community, and it's hard for us to defend lethal removal when it doesn't change the behavior. So just trying to problem solve this. I hear the point about not treating the symptom, but I'm not sure we know what the cause is right now. I fear the pressure is too much, so I want to figure out something more effective. That's my motivation behind this.

Comment

I agree there's a behavioral change. What caused the behavioral change? The change is simple, they go from ungulates to cattle. What causes that? I don't think this particular area is prey abundant. Now we have more pressure on the prey base. There's a reason wolves change prey source. This is where I was ten minutes ago. We need to look at causation, not symptoms.

Comment

Even going on that premise, where the prey base is limited, bringing cows back every year just makes that a continuing problem. I think there are still other creative ways we can think about solving the problem.

Comment

But if you're going to do that, there have to be agencies willing to open up other, different, patches of ground.

Comment

Totally agree.

Comment

I wanted to check in on process, since the Director has arrived. So we have Director Susewind for an hour. We have this social contract thing we've been working on, and I can't imagine what that felt like for Kelly, to try to understand and implement the guidance we put in the protocol. He was

thrown immediately right into a very challenging situation last August, and I just wanted to acknowledge that.

Director Susewind visit

WDFW Director Kelly Susewind visited WAG for an hour for a discussion. He thanked everyone for the work they do in the group. WAG is one of the most important advisory groups at WDFW. This is one of the most divisive issues he's dealt with. I think the only way we get through that is this forum. The fact that you've all come together is incredibly powerful.

The protocol is guidance for WDFW. It's not a rule, but it's the most powerful guidance we have. What you all come up with here is incredibly important, and will be used for years.

Every situation is unique. You can't write a protocol that captures everything. No matter what we have, the on-the-ground reality will be something different. Let's really set the stage for when lethal removal is an appropriate tool, and what things should be going through our minds before we use it.

Question

I'm interested in something that relates to the property WDFW owns. It's so challenging to figure out what to do in areas with chronic depredations. With any of the WDFW land, is there any thought related to maybe not reaching peak capacity with cattle grazing? Is there flexibility there for producers?

Director

We've certainly talked about it, but I'll be really honest. I'm not sure that nonlethals and lethals haven't worked well. You're setting yourself up for failure if you think every time there's conflict you've failed.

I think we do need to make our lands available if it works. Grazing is a big part of managing our lands, and we need to keep doing that. We may have a higher bar in regard to nonlethal deterrents, but we should treat our land like other land.

Comment

WDFW is in a conversations right now about how we address depredations on department lands. That conversation is really close to the protocol as far as the nuts and bolts go. But there is a conversation about a reserve allotment idea. What does that look like on our lands?

Comment

I want to make sure that everyone knows that WDFW has land. A lot of that land was private land to begin with. Crops were being grown, grazing was being done. WDFW buying land, and then taking grazing and crops off of it, would be the same as someone developing it. It's hard when the department comes to us and wants to buy land. I interact really well with our WDFW regional director. When we talk about removing agriculture, that's a difficult conversation to have.

Question

I'm curious how we can better educate the public. In particular, situations where there is not likely to be an issue, but because of lack of education, there is fear. Also, how can we find out information at the same time Capital Press finds out?

Director

On the education aspect, we also want you to tell us how we can improve on that. Unfortunately, when you're in budget cuts and budget shortfalls, education and outreach is one of the first things to go. I'm not an expert, but I know enough to know that we need to do the best job we can.

Question

Would you be willing to partner with NGOs that could draft up some form of informational piece? It could have your logo on it.

Director

On the surface, yes. It can't become a political tool. That being said, we should work with anyone and everyone who wants us to improve.

Question

There is a lot of department land that is not wolf habitat, but all department land is lumped together in the outline. Are we encouraging wolves to be on that ground? Are we encouraging wolves to den on that ground? Wolves are in places where the plan says it isn't wolf habitat. I don't think we want to encourage wolves in areas 50 miles from wolf habitat. I don't think the protocol should be as tough there. Right now we have wolves and sheep 10 miles from each other, and it's not wolf habitat.

Director

It doesn't always lead to depredations. I would be thinking about flexibility, but I want to hear what this group thinks. I'm not trying to cop out, but that's what I want to hear.

Question

Thank you for coming. For social tolerance to be maintained or enhanced, there has to be an element of controlling the wolf population. I think that's going to be a tough situation for us as a group. I just wanted to recognize the challenge that you have and the staff has. I guess just wanted to recognize that we're going to expect that option to be there as the wolf population grows. There has to be a balance.

Director

I firmly believe in balance and I think we need to hit a balancing point. Some of that will come in for the post recovery plan. We're not there, and right now those decisions are going to be made by the department on a case by case basis.

Question/comment

I would say that I think it's very concerning to the conservation community in northeast/eastern Washington that when wolves attack livestock, I don't think it should be quantified as a depredation when it's done outside grazing permits. Perhaps a way to avoid that is GPS ear tags on the cows. When I read about this in the press, these are called predations, and that falls within the metric of counting towards lethal removal. I think we need a different term, because those do not count. It doesn't pass the fairness protocol for the public. I would ask that those not count and there be a different definition for those sorts of attacks that occur but don't meet the threshold.

Director

First, I'm looking at this group to put sideboards on those things. That situation you're referencing, I worry about getting into the counting thing. That wasn't going to trigger an action. It was just more information. That said, I can see places where it's maybe outside, but it's a pattern that's going to

continue and we need to change behavior. That's what I look to with my staff advising me. Is there behavior that needs to be changed? When you try to bring it down to a hard number, it just doesn't fit. That would be where I look to all of you to tell me.

Comment

I think we need to bring Kelly up to speed a little bit. What we try to accomplish is having diverse perspectives and looking for that cohesion. Then it's important to know that you're okay with what we're working on. If what we're working on isn't something you're okay with, then we need to change our direction. I'll check in with Kelly tonight and get that feedback.

Comment

The comment that producers are leaving cattle on grazing lands is absurd to me. We try so hard to find them. The comment about GPS ear tags...I've been wanting that since I was 10 years old. The idea of us leaving them out there really burns a fire in me. We want to bring them back.

Comment

There are moments when the department really has the ability to make the call. I really appreciate when that call is made and then it's well verbalized how the department came to that decision. Even if I don't agree, I feel good about the communication around that.

Director

I appreciate that, and that's something we're definitely trying to do. I think we need to get more of a routine around getting the facts out there. And let people criticize. We want that feedback.

Comment

Thank you for going out to the northeast tomorrow. I haven't disagreed with any of your decisions so far.

Comment

I think next to the Governor you have the hardest job in state government. No matter what you do, someone is going to disagree. The fact that you were willing to jump right in and really learn about wolves is very much appreciated. And then the fact that you support staff and get their input, and support the ongoing commitment to nonlethal deterrence, is very important to our community.

Comment

I also want to thank you too. It's been a tough time so far, and you clearly care, and you clearly care about each one of us. You've reached out to us individually. It's nice to know that there is willingness to dig in.

Director

I think we all want wolves on the landscape and we all want to coexist. I'm telling you all that, but you already know it better than I do. We have to work together or it won't work.

Question

Are they going to be done with the budget on time?

Director

I'm still hearing they will be done on time.

Break

Wrap up

Rob addressed the group in an effort to set up day two of the meeting.

- Candace and Trent will bring a list of traits for range riders (Candace) and human presence (Trent) to discuss on day two
- Desire to get further along the list of protocol change topics

Comment

If someone came forward with suggestions on what things should say, that would help. We could then have a starting point for these topics and discuss these things. If you have an idea for what a change should look like, bring that forward and we can discuss as a group. It has to be a safe environment though.

Comment

I agree with that. We kind of ran around in circles today, and we could stand to have a clearer direction.

Comment

We also have that bill, 2097. It's not signed yet, but we're thinking it will be signed. It would be good to have the conversation on what that might look like in the protocol. I'd like to carve out time to discuss that if possible.

Comment

We're here until 5:00 today. I'm just wondering if we want to talk about some things now since it's only 4:08.

Continuing potential protocol changes

Comment

Let's talk about January attacks. Cattle wound up in a gully somewhere in deep snow on a U.S. Forest Service allotment in January. There were four animals. One was found and taken out alive, and the other three were dead and confirmed wolf depredation.

Comment

We had to go in about 10 miles. I would suspect the place had been inaccessible for months. Snow was at least waist deep. They rode in on horseback and herded that cow back out.

Comment

In waist deep snow, what do wolf tracks look like?

Comment

Around the cows, the snow was beaten down and there were clear signs of wolf presence.

Comment

Is there a chance the cows froze and were then eaten?

Comment

No. For a confirmation, there needs to be hemorrhaging and bite marks, and there was clear evidence of that.

Comment

Was it outside of the allotment area?

Comment

No, it was on the allotment. But it was outside of the time they should have been there.

Comment

If this was killed by any other predator, would the reaction be different? I'm trying to boil this down to where it's not just about a wolf killing something.

Comment

How did they find them?

Comment

They'd been actively looking for cattle for a while. It wasn't random. They were actively looking.

Comment

They were easily confirmed. The question is, do they count? The way the compensation program is set up, a confirmed wolf depredation means you get paid 2 times the amount of the value because there are likely more you didn't find. I would say these count because there were probably others not found.

Comment

Is it fair to say there would be others that weren't found? Do some survive winter conditions?

Comment

If the cow was able to walk 10 miles out, it couldn't have been that bad. They can dig and find food to survive.

Comment

It seems like there's a certain loss built into the season because of weather. There's a certain allowance. You try to avoid it as best you can, but it happens. At that point in the season, it was going to be a shot in the dark to find these cows in the first place. Regardless of the wolf part, these cows likely wouldn't have made it back for next spring. This was winter survival mode. This was not a wolf attacking a cow due to prey switching.

Comment

I think to help clarify that with WDFW's perspective. It is a confirmed wolf depredation. That means producers are eligible for compensation. The producer can decide to seek that or not. In terms of count, in that case there wasn't expected to be livestock out there. It happens, and we hope that's small. How do we help producers find those stragglers? Producers don't want them out there either. But there weren't any nonlethal deterrence measures used, so that part of the protocol wasn't being met. So one thing we're putting on our updates is whether or not depredations meet the expectations for the protocol. The compensation piece is separate.

Comment

Thank you for covering the issues there. In this area, the snow came gradually this year. What I know from speaking with folks up there is it's routine for cows to get lost. I don't mean to slight the producer in any way. That's just a reality of the landscape. I think these are the challenges we face. In particular, reporting is a big issue for my constituents.

Comment

In a vacuum, that wouldn't count. I also think, setting up for tomorrow, that in this situation the count wouldn't have mattered anyway. However, if it had ended up putting this pack over the four in 10 months, we'd have to think about how this fits into a pattern. The stuff said about the protocol covered what I wanted to say.

Comment

Deterrents weren't used, so they weren't part of the count. I know that's not easy for a producer to hear, but the way the protocol is written, this situation isn't going to count.

Comment

It's also about looking at the totality of the behavior. In any situation, do we think depredations are going to continue, is it a pattern, etc. The goal of the protocol is to change pack behavior. Yes, we had to put metrics around it, but we do think about all of those variables.

Comment

You have to have the metrics in place. I can easily say that none of the deterrents were there so it doesn't go to the count.

Comment

With all the facts, this seem kind of cut and dry. I agree with the previous statements.

January attacks were crossed off the list.

Public comment

Flip chart (morning session) comments

Group #1

- There were questions about the growth rate of the wolf populations (3 percent this year versus 28 percent overall)
- Loss of breeding pairs in eastern Washington this year.
 - Why is this?
 - What does this signal for the future?
 - How does this impact future decisions?
- Is there a way for people to raise money to move livestock out of the hot spots.
- Don't think private citizens should be involved in lethal removal.
 - Put wolves at risk of more inhumane treatment.
- How much acreage does one range rider cover?
 - How is that decided?
- Are there plans to collar more wolves as the population grows?
- Why is the Legislature trying to remove reporting requirements for nonlethal deterrents?

Group #2

- Because of unique circumstance around January depredations, they should not count
 - See discussion above under the Continuing potential protocol changes heading
- Concern around the collar failing in the first west side pack
 - Prioritize getting another collar in the pack
- Concern about adequate funding for all department work, including wolves
 - Getting creative with new money sources

Public Comment #1

Thank you for letting us come today. I'm very interested in this whole process. First of all, with these protocol changes, is there any way the public can offer suggestions? It would be helpful to know a way to do that. My concerns with the protocol is on how some of these depredations are reported and counted. If those January depredations were counted, they would count later. The department was thorough with the Togo depredation reports, and I have concerns about how those are counted. Six were listed, and two of those were before the Togo pack was formally recognized. On May 20, 2018, there was a week and a half old calf turned out. It was confirmed to be a wolf kill, but only scavenging was done by birds. On August 18, the depredation confirmed hemorrhaging, but had no bite marks. On August 18, a calf was discovered miles away from where it was supposed to be. Were there proper deterrents in place? In the OPT pack, if a cow is on the rendezvous site, it shouldn't count. Finally, the concern with the 10-month window is that in the posting on the website said Director Susewind had paused the lethal removal on the OPT, but was considering best actions after the January depredation. My other concern is that the depredation incident reports should be online as soon as possible. The PDR process takes too long. Please have a way for the public to provide input on the protocol.

Public Comment #2

I always enjoy learning from your discussions. Today started off a little wild. Someone talked about the importance of public education and what could be done. It occurred to me that the department could do more to educate policy makers who make decisions about this public resource. One thing one legislator asked was whether wolves had returned to Washington on their own or had been reintroduced. It shocked me that the legislator didn't know they are returning on their own. The other thing is to educate on listening to scientific information. These people are supposed to be taking information and making policy decisions, but they aren't listening to the information presented to them. We need to feel confident in legislators making decisions about wolves. I do want to make sure that tomorrow you will discuss the situation in the hot spot area, because even the department has said they don't want to kill wolves in that area over and over again. On the subject of video recording, I think the department should do whatever they can to make it available to the public. The WAG should not decide that. It should be a discussion that the department has internally. Will you be getting tomorrow to the things put out by the department? I'll touch on some of them. In the brainstorming ideas, it mentions allowing ranchers to kill wolves if they have a permit. How does the department ensure that the rancher kills a problem wolf? How does the department ensure that the shot is humane? How does the department ensure pups are not being orphaned? I think one brainstorming item was also allowing that on public land in areas where wolves are recovered. I want to double down on a point brought up before, making sure WDFW gets information out to the public before Capitol Press does. Get the information out sooner from the agency.

Public Comment #3

Would it be advantageous to have a range rider as a member of the WAG? That could help.

Public Comment #4

Just wanted to express my appreciation for everyone on the WAG. I think I came into this meeting expecting more heated rhetoric, and I appreciate that everyone is here to come to solutions and hear each other.

Public Comment #5

I was going to say some of the things brought up about the public being involved in lethal removal. I also wanted to mention that House Bill 2097, Section 2, documented in the grazing season

observation. The statement about conflict mitigation guidelines. This was developed in December. The bill was introduced in February. Was there collaboration between WDFW and Representative Kretz?

Answer

The original document (first pages) was created before the February WAG meeting and the second page was created after the bill dropped. These were combined into one document.

One other thing I wanted to respond to as well. Absolutely, we want to hear from the public on the protocol. After we complete this process, there is a draft period where we draft the language. If you could, please connect with a WAG member or department staff, and get that content that way, so we can manage the number of copies with edits.

Public Comment #6

Is it my understanding that the range rider expectations will be discussed tomorrow? I think it definitely makes a difference with experienced range riders versus younger ones. My big concern is the areas with a lot of mileage and acreage. How do you keep track? There were good points brought up. What is the solution when we're hearing that it's nearly impossible to get out there? Why should it be counted? If cattle are in an area where ATVs and horses can't go regularly, what do we do? Hopefully I get notes for tomorrow's meeting. Another concern is the pack sizes. Packs are getting smaller. The largest pack is Carpenter Ridge. We've already lost so many. They don't have a voice and we're here to speak on their behalf. We do attend and spend all this time. It just seems like the public doesn't have any say in the decision. It seems like the public's voice isn't counted for the final decision. Would producers be willing to go out as well or is it just range riders?

Answer

It's on the list, and we haven't resolved it yet. I think it's definitely a goal to get to it.

Public Comment #7

One question I have is that as a member of the public, land purchased with taxpayer money should be used to protect fish and wildlife. I'm not clear on whether that's the case based on the conversation today.

Check out

Everyone checked out around the room.

Meeting adjourned for the day.

Wolf Advisory Group meeting notes

April 25, 2019

Comfort Inn Conference Center
1620 74th Avenue SW
Tumwater, WA 98501

WAG members: Samee Charriere, Tim Coleman, Don Dashiell, Tom Davis, Dave Duncan, Diane Gallegos, Andy Hover, Jess Kayser, Jessica Kelley, Ralph Kratz, Molly Linville, Nick Martinez, Dan Paul, Lisa Stone, Paula Swedeen

WDFW staff members: Donny Martorello, Candace Bennett, Ben Maletzke, Trent Roussin, Stephanie Simek, Dan Brinson, Rob Geddis, Matthew Trenda, Julia Smith

Facilitator: Rob Geddis

Fish and Wildlife Commission: Jay Holzmilller, Barbara Baker

Welcome and check in

Rob welcomed everyone to the second day of the meeting and everyone checked in around the room.

Members share concerns/questions/perspectives about their actions in 2018, when they and/or their organizations had concerns about wolf-related decisions

One thing that was heard was that if WAG makes a decision, and we use sufficient consensus to make that decision, there's a chance that someone may disagree with that decision. However, because of the sufficient consensus, that's a decision made by "we." It isn't some members made a decision and some didn't.

Second, the word decision can mean different things. Sometimes, the department makes a decision that isn't necessarily a WAG decision. So what is our internal process if we think we're in that situation? That was the other theme expressed to Rob before this meeting.

Question

In some cases, constituents really hate the decisions made by WAG. If you just explain the process, is that undermining the WAG?

Comment

My opinion is that it doesn't undermine, but I'd also explain WAG's shared goals, and how we're all working toward the same thing.

Comment

I think we need to be careful with the word "decision." We're not making decisions, we're making recommendations.

Comment

The other element is that we're allowed to have dissenting positions. That is okay. The model is that you then honor the WAG. One thing we've said in the past is, "I don't agree with this, but I feel my concerns have been heard."

The WAG reviewed the vision statement and decision-making among WAG wording.

Comment

I think there's a difference between someone going out and saying, "I don't agree with the decision for lethal removal" and saying, "I don't think the department followed the protocol correctly." What I'm not okay with is when you start questioning the document. That brings into play how we are all looking at this document. That's what we're discussing right now.

Comment

Thank you for that. I have a slightly different view. In the past, there's been an emphasis when the department goes forward that they are following the protocol that the WAG came up with. That puts a lot of ownership on us. If we are saying they're implementing this in our name, and we agreed to that content in the protocol, then following the protocol is really important. If it's not followed, that undermines our credibility. To me, saying that we don't feel the department followed through should be allowed. The other way is for us to convene before anyone ever says anything about it. Rather than any group making a statement without checking in, we meet and discuss. We need some way to talk about it in a way that doesn't upset the rest of the group.

Comment

In the first protocol, we used language saying it was co-developed with the WAG. Lately, we have gotten away from that. As soon as we say that we're going to implement the new protocol, we take ownership. So we're trying to get away from that language and instead own it for ourselves. The WAG made the recommendation, and we made the decision to implement that recommendation. That's the department's ownership.

Comment

So let's focus on if one of us is in a position where we and our organization feels like we need to make a statement, what's the process?

Comment

If you're just saying that you disagree with the decision, I don't think we need to meet. However, if you're saying that you disagree with the process, then I think we need to get together and discuss it.

Comment

For me, if any group had a concern, I would want to hear about it so I could learn and understand it. Maybe the person with the concern can reach out and we can get on a phone call or something. We wouldn't be obligated to have the phone call, but it's there if we want to have it for understanding.

Comment

I think it should be mandatory that we get an information call from WDFW when there's a pending lethal removal decision.

Comment

Those feel like two separate things though, right?

Comment

Yes, but then it allows us to operate in the same universe of knowledge.

Comment

If there's something we're concerned about in regard to the protocol, my first inclination would be to get in touch with the department. My first step would be to fact check it with the department. After that, I'd reach out to WAG.

Comment

In a situation where there's a pending lethal removal, tensions are very high, and the system is flared a bit. The call is a way to get the information out, but I'm wondering if it stresses the system more. Is there a way we can respond or get the information out through the public update process? We want to train ourselves so we know that the public wants certain items in the updates. These details are important to the public. That then becomes part of our culture. I remember when our notices were short, without much detail, and this last year they were longer. So what does that look like going into the future? A call feels a little funny to me, and I'm not sure why. It's almost like a check in rather than information sharing.

Comment

I would offer that it might actually have the opposite effect because it can be somewhat cathartic to check in with WAG in our advisory role. We're also on edge. We know we're going to get a lot of challenges from our peer groups. So a call could be a way for us to talk and process and level questions at the department that they can be prepared to answer the next time around. I can see it being creative and helping to relieve tension a bit.

Comment

I can see the point about a call being uncomfortable. I also think when the department has made the decision to go to lethal, their information should be there. I understand there are some things that can't be said, but I do think it's destructive to have a lot of different voices saying things about the situation. Sometimes we aren't able to say anything for weeks. Having a quick call like that to reassure us that the protocol has been followed, and to have our questions answered, would be really helpful.

Comment

Last year we had two members who had serious concerns about what was going on. I was not aware of that growing concern until the messages came out. I think we need that release valve, and as a group it'll be valuable to have that. This would also prevent the department from having that conversation separately with all of us at the same time. This lets us all get on the same track too.

Comment

I support what the previous comments said. It would be very helpful. And all situations may not be like that, but there are times when it's more controversial, and it would be helpful to have that call. When there are different bits of information going around, it feeds into forces that could pull us apart. The call would help us be good representatives to our public as well.

Comment

I can really appreciate that sharing the information would be helpful. I do come back to staff safety in the field. We've had significant credible threats towards staff. So the amount of information being released can be dangerous.

Comment

I think we're only asking you to share what is safe to share. We don't want to put anyone in jeopardy at all.

Comment

So, for the information sharing, absolutely. The question is what is the best vehicle for that? There are lots of rumors going around, so I'm absolutely for information sharing. I'm not against a call. A couple years ago, we said that the protocol's in place, we'll have the department implement it, and then we'll check in at the end of the year. So the reluctance I have is if there's a call, will all of you being bombarded? Is it setting us up for that? How do we make it so it's information sharing, it's satisfying, but it's not pushing and pulling around it?

Comment

I think we've tried both ways, and every single time information has gotten out that leads to threats. I agree that providing information is good, but last year every situation we had equated to serious threats. One thing I'd throw out is that if we're about to move to lethal, are you wanting a call every time we do an action, or is it just the first time? Field staff won't be on the call, it'll just be Donny.

Comment

I think recognizing staff safety and the situations, I'm okay with a muted call. The department just talks, and we learn. Then we know what's in place, what nonlethal deterrents have been used, and so on. It's very helpful for us to have the universal knowledge. It's perfectly clear that the Director makes the final decision. It's not an opportunity for us to convince anyone.

Comment

I don't want the group to micromanage the department, so I agree with the previous statement. How often do we get to lethal removal in a super short period of time? So you can have four depredations in a day?

Comment

Yes.

Comment

In some of those situations, we're near the threshold, and you let us know this decision could come up. That's easier than letting us know during the operation.

Comment

I also don't want to micromanage, and I don't need every detail. I just want to know that the protocol is being followed. Somehow, I need a way to do my due diligence and make sure we're on course. I think the community is still in that place where trust with the department is an issue. If you're going to lethal, I would hope you have the information available. There were several of us last year who wanted to jump on a call and hear what was happening. I'm fine with a muted call.

Comment

I agree with that. So say we get this information, and then one of us still feels like a statement needs to be made. Then I would like the opportunity for that person to have a discussion with other WAG members. This is if the organization or person is not feeling okay with the decision. I would like that opportunity for WAG to discuss. The department doesn't need to be involved at that point. It's a WAG thing.

Comment

It would be helpful to know what kinds of questions you want answered.

Comment

Just walk us through the protocol decision. That's all we want to hear.

Comment

Absolutely. And in regard to the muted line, we trust you. It would be super helpful to have some standing things. Like walking through the protocol and explaining those decisions. There also might be some questions from the community, and if you could get us those the night before, we can do our best to answer what we can, keeping in mind staff safety. We'd love to give you that detail of what goes into a decision.

Comment

That would be great. Thank you.

Comment

A call that would walk WAG members through the protocol for the management decision. That is the decision that has been made.

Comment

Is there a way WAG can have independent meetings? I think it would be helpful, but I don't want to do anything that would upset the Director's Office.

Comment

We'll have to check. As a body, if you're talking wolves and you're the WAG.

Comment

My intent was not that this is something we do every time. I think this is a special case. I think we can predict sometimes what's really going to push buttons.

Comment

I do want some more discipline around it, especially for the first season we're doing it. Not for each pack action, but when that pack first gets near that threshold, I think it's necessary.

Comment

Just to summarize, we're hearing that WAG members would appreciate an information call in certain situations. Not every situation, but certain ones. The other thing is that WAG wants to have a space to have discussions that don't necessarily need the department present.

So the question is what kinds of situations justify the call?

Comment

I would say the first depredation this season of the packs that are currently on the threshold. After the first depredation would be reasonable, I think.

Comment

Is it after a decision is made? Because until then there's no action. Once there is a decision, that's when the action is, and that feels like when you all need the information quickly. At that stage, we have a 90-page recommendation that staff has compiled, and we're ready to walk you through the protocol at that stage. Does that meet your needs?

Comment

The point at which the Director makes the decision has a lot of stress in the system, but when the situation looks like it's headed that way, that's also a helpful time to have that information. It would be helpful to have the call to say here's where things are. Giving us some information beforehand could help think through that. I know the pros and cons, but wanted to throw that out there to think about.

Comment

If you're going to walk through the protocol, I don't think you can do it prior to the decision. I think that's all we should have to have.

Comment

I agree with that. I think doing it beforehand, it could be months in between. That could pull more staff. That also puts us in a position of, "Have you tried this and this and this?" I like waiting until the decision is made.

Comment

Maybe there's also an improvement in how we communicate all the information before the decision is made. What's missing from those updates? We can specify and be better about those. What are the explicit needs for those public updates when there's a depredation.

Comment

I think Donny's done a good job of contacting several people when things are about to happen. I think making those group-wide is helpful. Otherwise it feels like favoritism.

Comment

Totally agree. That can be better.

Comment

There's a big burden for us to make sure the protocol is being followed. I'm just saying, informing the WAG as you go would be helpful.

Comment

When the Director makes a decision, we get it out to the public immediately. My thought is, in that same space, we're now scheduling this call to provide information. I think we try this for this year. I also want to hear from other department staff members on how they're feeling about this.

Comment

I'm listening and trying to hear what WAG needs. I came into the department at the very end of the season last year. My first thought was that everyone was trying so hard and needed support. But the needs of the WAG should also be validated. When we come into these times of stress, I think I can help with calls or sharing information or doing what we can. I don't want to create more work, but that doesn't mean WAG's needs shouldn't be met.

Comment

I think we should be sharing this information and it's a good idea. I just think we need to be really honest that these things are extremely busy. There's a possibility that things might get crazy. It's not an empty promise, but I don't want to say something while knowing that when the time comes, we might not be able to pull it off just like you want it.

Comment

I'm glad you are talking about this. I've been living with this uneasy feeling all through last season about our communication with the WAG. It needs to be heard. I agree that we don't want empty promises. I think with a little more organization at HQ, we can do this. Let's not burden the field staff more.

Comment

By the time HQ makes a decision, field staff have provided everything we are able to provide. At that point, HQ has it all.

Comment

Right, it's just a matter of getting our ducks in a row at HQ. We're asking WAG to be conduits for the department, and not informing them is irresponsible. I think this is our responsibility to make sure WAG has what they need.

Comment

In our world, you say an old adage, "Be careful you don't ride a good horse to death." This is asking a lot of Donny and Kelly to try to talk to everyone. I understand where you're coming from. Maybe we need to delegate someone to be that person to inform WAG.

Comment

Maybe we get this 90-page document down to something more reasonable as well. Then we can post it on the website.

Comment

Just wanted to say that if you think you're going to have additional questions, please get those to us ahead of time. You'll get that need met if that's the case.

Comment

I think that after this discussion, we're getting close to understanding what we need. I just want to make sure we get to the protocol today. I would suggest we condense this and move on at this point.

Comment

I'd like to recommend that WDFW be willing to commit to a call when a lethal decision be made. Then we can walk through the protocol, and then after that I don't expect an individual call. Seems like that would be much more efficient.

Comment

Increment #1, we have the call. Are there other calls after that?

Comment

No, unless there's a weird circumstance, because we've already walked through the protocol at that point.

Comment

Are there other situations or decisions concerning to the producer community where this would also be a useful venue? I'm thinking about the data sharing stuff last year. That's a little less regular, but I think if there's value there, it could be helpful to have a call for those as well.

Comment

To that point, I felt a real rumbling last year, and I sent an email to Donny and we put something together for my folks. I think there would be value there for a call.

Comment

So to summarize, if there's a lethal decision for the first incremental removal, the department will set up a call for WAG and walk through the protocol with WAG for that pack. WAG will send any additional questions beforehand.

Comment

In my world, I'm better off not knowing this information. I get all these phone calls, and I tell them I trust the department. And that's a good answer for my folks. If I know something, then I can't say that. I like being in the dark, and I've never called the department for any of these situations. I get my updates, and that's that. I would like to trust the department more to do their job. I think as we go more towards lethal, we should be trusting them more.

Comment

This is what we learn, right? All communities have different needs, so how do we meet those needs?

Comment

It's not a non-trust, it's being well-informed so we can be trustworthy.

Comment

The part we might be missing is when a member has a problem. Do we need to set up a process with the WAG members communicating with each other?

Comment

I think what I heard was that department staff will check with the Director so there's not a process issue with that part of it.

Comment

What if one of you feel like another one didn't honor the WAG process? I just want to know that you're thinking about that.

Break

Continue protocol discussion

The WAG members continued the discussion from the previous day's meeting.

Comment

There is an add to the list. This is clarifying the investigation protocol expectations.

Next, if you remember, we asked Candace and Trent to do some homework yesterday. We also had a couple flags put in for the item on what if pack removal happens 2 years in a row.

Comment

Let's begin with 10 and 3. It looks like we can combine talking about them. Number 10 says move "avoid...sites" to the top of the deterrent list. I flag that one because some things on the list seem like they're done before the grazing season.

Comment

I think what we've learned from the past is the best way to avoid conflict is to avoid those sites. So I think moving it just puts emphasis on that.

Comment

The thing is, we don't know where the den sites are 90 percent of the time.

Comment

I think we can still move it to the top of the list of deterrence measures in the protocol.

Comment

We can also remove the numbers in the protocol altogether. Top of the list makes sense to me, but we can remove the numbers and just make it a bulleted list.

****Moved to the top of the list and numbers removed****

Comment

Number 3 is in regard to distance from den/rendezvous sites.

Comment

The department notifies producers (if they know) about den and rendezvous locations.

Comment

They may not know where this year's sites are, but they have historical data on that.

Comment

Yes, and I would say most producers have knowledge of those past locations as well.

Comment

I don't think we need a specified distance, but I think the conflict specialists work with that producer and try to put a plan together in the allotment we have available.

Comment

Is there a similar response from the Colville? Are they listening to you on pasture management?

Comment

It depends on the location. It's a little different. It's an elevation thing, as well as other factors. If there's a location where there's no choice, and we're going to have that overlap, we need to be more aware and be diligent.

Comment

I just wanted to note that I appreciated in last year's update, when one site was discovered, the conflict specialist asked the rancher to move cattle. That's an example of having that good dialogue and it working. The intent is for conflict specialist and the producer to work together to avoid these cases.

Comment

Sometimes it can't be helped, right?

Comment

So in the protocol, it says to work with WDFW conflict specialists to avoid these areas. Is the language in the protocol still good? It doesn't say anything about a set distance, but is that okay?

Comment

Don't we have some fairly good science that tells us that we have a minimum distance?

Comment

I don't think there's any science that says any distance from a den and a rendezvous site. I can't think of a single paper that sets a distance for keeping cows away from a site.

Comment

It is something you're aware of because it's a probability thing. I think the science is really mixed on it.

Comment

So the word is "avoid?"

Comment

Yes, and I think we can speak to some of the work this summer. There are wolves in the same field as cattle and they're all doing their thing. General locations are pretty similar from year to year.

Comment

It's pretty variable. Some packs will use areas consistently, and some packs change every year. It's hard to predict.

Comment

That's why we try to relay what we know, but it's not definite.

Comment

I remember reading depredation reports that had a lot of information on depredations well away from den and rendezvous sites. It's certainly helpful to avoid them, but sometimes that's not at all the factor. I think it's important for us to remember that.

Comment

1,000 meters away would eliminate about 750 acres of grazing. That's a pretty big chunk of ground. But I'm happy with what the previous commenter said.

Comment

Right now the suggestion is we don't set a distance, but try to avoid sites when we can. Is that all right with everyone?

Comment

Last year we had a site on private property. How do you tell someone what to do on their private ground? It doesn't need analysis, it's just something I wanted to flag because there's always something to throw the monkey wrench in.

Comment

Our messaging no matter the landowner is that it's in our best interest to be more vigilant.

****The group agreed on that decision****

Comment

The next one will be number 13, the effects of tribal hunting.

Comment

The Colville Tribe has announced open season on wolves with no harvest number set. An additional piece of this is, can a proxy hunt for a member of the tribe, and what are the rules on that on, say, treaty lands. What's the effect on population dynamics? How does the department quantify that in terms of recovery objectives?

Comment

I can speak as a former wildlife biologist for the Spokane Tribe. On the reservation, it's only tribal members.

Comment

Is that specific to the Spokane reservation, or across the board?

Comment

I can't speak for off the reservation, but for the Colville's, it's specific to tribal members.

Comment

Part of why I brought this up is that we have no control over what the tribe sets. Whatever happens there won't have any impact on recovery in Washington.

Comment

This was raised because given that it's an unlimited hunt (no bag limit, no time limit), it seems like it might impact recovery. It might not, but it seems prudent for us to be aware of it. We have a certain number of packs, and those packs are relatively stable, so when lethal control happens we can be okay. This introduces a little bit of uncertainty. So can we have some assurance from the department that this will be monitored, and that if impacts do happen, we are aware of that in our protocol. For the protocol, we are making assumptions about populations and other items. Should we be concerned about that? Should we be thinking about that?

Comment

I definitely hear that. I know one of my concerns is that we're sharing real time data in areas where there is an unlimited hunt, and the data is available to county commissioners, producers, and others. The real time data can also make those animals vulnerable. So how we deal with collars in those areas is a question. There's usefulness and sensitivity there, both. I don't have a good answer to that yet.

Comment

I don't know why we're talking about this that much. We can't control what the tribes do on their land. I think if we want to look at something, we look at their deer and elk populations and see what's going on there.

Comment

None of the three county commissioners or the sheriff in Okanogan County have collar data, and that's where a lot of the overlap is. Just wanted to flag that.

Comment

In Ferry County and Stevens County, that is available.

Comment

We can ask the tribes. If they choose to share information, they will. If not, they won't. We do talk about the tribal piece when we make decisions. There is coordination with the tribes, but they don't have to share that with us if they don't want to. That's up to the tribe.

Comment

I would just say that we develop the protocol in advance of any kind of hunting season, so does this influence my thinking? Yes. We're wanting this to fit with the recovery objectives of the plan.

Comment

Does the department get depredation reports from the tribes?

Comment

No. The tribe has a totally different way of approaching livestock grazing. They don't do depredation investigations, so they are also not lethally removing wolves.

Comment

We can ask for this information, and it'll be brought up at the Interagency Wolf meeting tomorrow (4/26) as well.

Comment

Those packs count towards the recovery goal. I think despite the legislation, I've heard members of the ranching community ask for the protocol to be more responsive. It's possible that lethal happens more often, and if that's the case, I think we should be aware of how that interacts with a tribal hunting season. We should think about what those interactions are. I might be more comfortable with protocol changes if I know there's that feedback loop.

Comment

Once a year, we do get the reports on tribal hunting.

Comment

Given that you get information about packs being affected by these hunts, I would like there to be some sensitivity to how that interacts with the decision to go to lethal. If that happens often enough to interrupt recovery, that would be good for us to talk about. Maybe we need to adjust the protocol at that time.

Comment

I think you saw in the brainstorming message we sent out, that yes we will be thinking about this. We'll be monitoring, and when we think about lethal removal, we'll be deep diving into what it means for recovery in the area and statewide. If we see things that cause concern, then at that point it's how we respond to them.

Comment

It feels like a slippery slope to write protocol around something we have zero control over. This is a moment where I would trust the department to do what was just said and put no sideboards around it. I'm not comfortable for WAG to have a say there.

Comment

So I'm hearing concern for potential impacts, certainly, but hearing no changes to the protocol at this time.

Comment

This is fine, and I trust the department. But this decision will make me think more conservatively in other parts of the protocol.

Comment

We wouldn't expect anything else.

Comment

We do have a formal feedback loop with the tribe, and obviously with this hunting season we're going to be talking to them more. We're just not sure how that data is being presented to us yet. We do track that to inform our decision-making though.

Comment

The other piece is that when we're at a point making these decisions, we are considering all those other factors. If we're in a situation where we are considering a lethal operation, we're going to make sure all factors are considered. We're going to reach out regardless.

Comment

How many wolves were on the reservation last year that counted into the minimum count?

Comment

About 40.

Comment

Of those 40, do you have a number for exclusively on tribal land? Would it make sense to not include that number in the state count?

Comment

It would not. They don't stay there. Think about dispersal and those kinds of things.

There was agreement on the protocol decision

Comment

Next was number 12: Better define "event."

Comment

You have depredations that occur in the same or similar timeframe, but they're at different locations. Or you find predations at different times, but they could have happened at the same time. Is that an event? Is each carcass an event?

Comment

I can tell you the WDFW train of thought. From field perspective, we've had discussions on how to break up these events. I will tell you that each depredation we do have that conversation. Is this a single event or multiple? If it's a cow/calf pair and injuries occurred about the same time, it can be one event. If it's 14 sheep all at the same time, that's a single event. When they are close, we have the discussion.

Comment

If there's three animals, is that three depredations?

Comment

An event can have multiple depredations. For the "count," we go off of the event. So an event where 14 sheep are killed, there are 14 depredations, but it counts as one event to the total for lethal removal consideration.

Comment

Maybe we move event to the definition section in the very front of the protocol.

Comment

Any objection to that?

Comment

If we move it, it needs to be very clearly defined, and right now it's not really. So let's do that. At what proximity does distance become one event?

Comment

Immediate area. We could add proximity into that.

Comment

We had a very large WAG discussion a few years ago on this. It's one of those things where it really is based around the depredation investigation. There are a lot of factors that go into that.

Comment

I'm okay with that, as long as everyone else is okay with it. If everyone is okay with what was said, I'm good with it.

Comment

A typical event was one cow or one cow/calf. That was kind of the standard we used.

Comment

I think the reason it came back up is that it seemed there were events where one predation was found, then a second was found in the same area, but the degree of consumption was different. It could have been the same event, but you didn't find it. It's unlikely, but it can happen, right?

Comment

Yes, and it's usually injuries. And we have to talk about if we think those are the same timeline.

Comment

We're also trying to change pack behavior. If it was the same event, we want the ability to have some space in the protocol.

Comment

We do have that discussion. If we're not sure, we have a very in-depth discussion around timelines.

Comment

So what I'm hearing is that we want to take the description of event and move it to the definition section.

****Agreement on that****

Comment

Next is number 14, what if pack removal happens two years in a row in the same area?

Comment

I think this goes back to yesterday. I go back to the emotion of last summer. For most of the livestock producers I know, this isn't a hard question. If wolves are attacking livestock, something needs to be done. But I look at my friends here, and I know there's a different view on that. I think we need to find a way through this. If we have a protocol established where lethal is used in times of need, then does it matter how many years in a row it's used? What is the process to get through that?

Comment

When we were in the grazing season, it wasn't working for any of the user groups. The hurt was different, but it was all hurt. But in the same breath, we've also learned that when nonlethals aren't working, it doesn't mean they aren't good. We know there's nothing we can do that will eliminate conflict. We try to use the tools we have, and we know there's no guarantee. We also know each tool we have has a shelf life. So how do we look at this through another lens that says maybe it's the place, and how do we do better in that place?

Comment

I'm thinking about the Legislature right now too. I'm wondering if this is applying to all areas, or does it change based on the recovery area we're talking about? Does that make a difference? Secondly, I struggle with this one. So many things happen between years that are different. Dispersing, pack dynamics, etc. There's so much that happens, that trying to make something different is challenging for me.

Comment

I can understand that, but I also think if we're having repeated conflict in the same area every year, then to me that's a sign that nothing we've tried (lethal or nonlethal) is working. That doesn't mean it can't work in other situations, but I think it's a good sign that in that place, it hasn't been working. I know this is hard for producers as well, having to go through that each year. I'm raising this for them as well. It seems unfair to set up this carousel of killing wolves year after year. It's really difficult. This is supposed to buy more than one season. I don't know what the answer is, and I'm not proposing a hard line. I understand the challenges, but I want there to be an opportunity to think creatively prior to that situation happening. What could be done differently? This is multiple use land, and there are expectations from the public, but also to acknowledge that it's important for the producers to not feel this hurt as well.

Comment

This is a hard topic, and some of the concern from the producer community is if we're speaking about OPT specifically, it's not a small number of predations, right? The concern is that we still have wolves that are selecting from livestock. What happens is you have a producer who's using nonlethals, then those cattle are removed, and we have wolves selecting for livestock. I really feel weary about changing protocol for a what if situation.

Comment

I recall that the evidence gleaned from Profanity Pack didn't support that the wolves had decided to eat cows. They were still mostly eating ungulates. My experience is that the cattle congregate in the riparian areas and they clear areas of vegetation and fish, and they become sitting ducks down there. It sets up this conflict where prey are mixed in with the livestock, and the livestock gets separated. They get caught in terrain traps. There are features where there are lots of old ponds, and those create terrain traps. The cows and calves get separated, and there are lots of pressures, and they are congregated where it's cool and where there's water. Then there's the other part where cows are pushed to upper elevations, and that happens again where cows are caught in terrain traps. This is steep, tough landscape. This is a unique area, and I'd say we have gone to the U.S. Forest Service, and asked how we can provide pastures in lower elevations, and provide water, and provide another option, but the Forest Service isn't coming along on this one. We continue to press for this change and reduce this risk. An additional benefit is to the ungulate populations who need that forage for the winter. It feels like one producer is getting all the benefits and no one else is there.

Comment

Unfortunately, I don't think this is wolves or deterrents. I think trying to boil it down is presumptuous. The science is incredibly variable. What that tells you is only 40 percent of what's probably going on. So saying range riding doesn't work here makes me nervous, because there are a lot of other things. I know the drought was brought up. I think it's a bigger picture and bigger conversation. We need to think a little bigger. We can't say what's going on here, because there are so many variables. I think we came up with 20 different things, and that was just brainstorming.

Comment

If you're going in to lethal removal every year, you don't have a wolf problem. The wolves are there every year. It's a numbers game. You remove them, and they come right back in.

Comment

There's no solution here, and I know that's frustrating. Because it's so complex, the team is wracking their heads trying to find a solution. We have all these variables, we have a pattern. I would say, let's give that team enough space to figure this one out. We're not going to be able to write a recipe that makes this go away. Let's empower creative thinking and remember that every case is different.

Comment

My comfort level on this topic is that the protocol remains the same, and we know that lethal is the call of the Director and the department. We know the department knows this is a hot spot. I'm comfortable keeping the protocol the same and trusting the department.

Comment

The statement about the numbers game is incredibly insensitive to how the public feels. The portion of the public that doesn't like to see wolves at all, that doesn't like to see wolves on public lands, that doesn't like to see wolves killed on the same spot three years in a row, has expectations for us on the WAG. I know that everyone is under pressure. All I'm speaking to are the pressures that I know and that I'm dealing with. There is a point when a decision is made, and we keep on this carousel, it puts a lot of pressure on the producer community and the environmental community. I think it is worth it for us to consider how we stop going down this same path. So if it looks like we have to go to lethal in this same spot again, we convene and we talk about it. We are happy to help find solutions that work for the producer and also avoid lethal control. You have to understand, we

may not be able to withstand that pressure. I'm not discounting your part of it, but I ask you to think about what it'll be like for us next season if lethal removal is used in the same spot right now. I don't think it's okay. I'm willing to try to be really creative and come up with something that works. We need to acknowledge the position we find ourselves in.

Comment

Thank you for that statement. I represent the Humane Society. Our members do not support lethal removal in the same place year after year. I propose we don't offer lethal removal for a third year, and instead offer to move the cows to different land. We can't support a carousel approach.

Comment

This isn't meant in any way offensive, so I'm sorry if it comes out this way. I don't know this exact location, but I assume it's similar to where I'm at. These leases are hundreds of years old. And now what I'm hearing is that we need to move these cows because wolves want to be there. Why can't we move the wolves? When they do have to go to lethal, and there's talk about humane removal. There's nothing humane about the way a wolf kills. I take real offense when people say we need to move cows. They've been there longer than wolves.

Comment

This feels very early WAG. The idea is to make the producer whole and find a place that works for all involved. It's looking at the landscape as the problem, and not the cattle, wolves, or department as the problem.

Comment

In a scenario like this, do you think that call we talked about earlier could assist? We've tried different things, and we need to be better about communicating that. Maybe that is your early question, right? Is this the same place, and have we tried different things? Do you think that call would meet what you're looking for?

Comment

I think they're two issues. That would absolutely help. But there's still that question of whether we're just trying to blast our way out of this. I think getting the information out there faster, and clearer too, could help.

Comment

There are a lot of things we've used in this place over the years are very different, and I wanted to know if that would be helpful.

Comment

I think this takes us back full circle to last summer when we revisited page 6 of the protocol that talks about the best suited methods for specific livestock operations. The feasibility thing is what we're bumping our heads against. We have options, but one option that does not work, and will not be supported by the public, is just doing the same thing. You hear from the public that the problem is the wolves shouldn't be on public land in the first place. That's a real issue, and what we're saying is that we're trying to work with you. It's not like other areas. It's a different landscape. Short summers, cold winters, lots of vegetation. The geology is an issue (terrain traps). We're not talking across the board. I'm trying to think how we quantify areas best suited. This idea of public lands grazing. A lot of the country doesn't understand. It's not okay to say that we're going to continue with what we're doing. We have to work together and find a solution. We care about producers. Maybe we can't quantify this in the protocol, but some direction would be helpful, I think.

Comment

So I came into this group in December, and I'm reading off the charts here that we're all feeling emotions, feelings, and values, and it's good that we can say those things. I want to encourage you to give each other some slack, because I don't sense any ill-intent anywhere in this group.

Comment

I want to second that. I love this conversation. We're all raw right now. We're all coming from the same place. All of these ideas are good enough to explore. How do we shift from "that won't work" do thinking about how we tweak things so that they do work? Are there times when a producer would want to move cattle? Let's explore these ideas and determine if we should spend more time on them. There are some things we can do on paper. We know we can do nonlethal deterrents, and we know we can do lethal. Let's make those better. There are other things that are outside of us. But we can stimulate and encourage those things.

Comment

This makes it a cow problem and a wolf problem. If the space is filled every year, something else is going on there. Going into the future, we're going to have more cases like this. Is our long term solution just moving the cows every time? We don't want to push the problem to another spot. Also, be real careful drawing the line between public and private ground.

Comment

I like solutions. So you throw out a solution and try to find out the pitfalls. Moving cows, there are a lot of pitfalls. Is it a solution? Possibly. But one thing I heard, is the WDFW buys property. Then the public says their money was used to purchase that land and they don't want cows on that property. WDFW can make that choice to have cattle. But we're getting more and more public property for the public good, and then the public says it's not okay to do certain things on that property. So we're starting to restrict ourselves. Do you want to see wolves killed in the same spot four years in a row? Of course not. But today I don't know if we can come up with language on what we should do. But I do think we should keep working on it, because it's not going away. It'll show up in other places as well and it'll move around. I think we have to keep looking at this and try to find solutions, but I don't know if we'll get there today.

Comment

I'm a cause and effect guy. This protocol is a tool, and we're trying to adjust a tool without knowing what the problem is. I'm not sure what the problem is, but I would look first at what the feds say. Do we have an inadequate prey base density? I believe we do. Nobody has talked about that all day. Changing tools without knowing what the problem is isn't good. I'm with Paula, I don't want to shoot wolves every year. But we're not going to have any success just changing the tool.

Break for lunch

Continue protocol discussion, and if time permits, update members on post delisting planning

WAG members continued the protocol discussion. Rob summarized the discussion so far on #14. A lot of concerns were churned up throughout the discussion. He proposed to break into small groups for 45 minutes with an assignment to brainstorm. Brainstorm means there's no such thing as a bad idea. Group #1 is discussing what could be better with our current tools? Group #2 could discuss how to implement lethal removal so it's more effective. Group #3 could brainstorm ideas that haven't been tried yet. After the group efforts, we could come back together and discuss.

Comment

I vote no on that proposal. This is project level stuff in the big planning deal. That seems like a project for the department rather than WAG. I don't know if we can come up with anything that would help at this point. I'd like to get to some of the other things as well.

Comment

I agree with that, and it's not because I don't want to come up with solutions.

Comment

I'm going to throw something out as well. If we look at this from the 30,000 foot level, and we tie together #14 and #1 (range rider expectations), what are some techniques that could be utilized if we're at a point where year after year a pack is removed on the same spot? It's just like range management. If something is happening, can a producer change what they're doing and adapt? If this keeps happening, it's going to be really tough for some of us to continue to be here, because they have constituents they have to answer to. Moving cattle off the range is going to be really, really difficult in some situations. In some concept, we need the department to think about, could there be places for cows to be moved, and are there techniques that could be utilized sometime in the future? Nothing official yet, but for a point in the future.

Comment

I think as WAG members, we've all been clear to the department that this is a concern. It may be difficult to find protocol changes. It would fall to them to recognize that different things need to be tried. All sides have expressed how important this is, and how difficult it is. I'd put it on the department.

Comment

Thank you, all, for sharing that. We've had different experiences with discussing protocols. Last time, the department went off for a while, after hearing everything you shared, and came back with suggestions. Would something like that help in this situation as well? I need acknowledgement from staff on that.

****Staff agreed to do that****

Comment

Thank you for voicing that. I'm going to put out a concrete proposal. It was something I was trying to articulate yesterday, but it didn't really work. I'm proposing this instead of moving cows. If there are potential known innovations that have not yet been tried within one of the tools (like range riding), in that subsequent year, the producer tries them. So it's not in the middle of the season moving the goalpost. It's saying that there are going to be cows and wolves in the same situation. Prey density is not an issue that will be resolved in one year. Right now, wolves are occupying the territory, and cows are going to be there as well. They'll be crossing over, and we'll have a situation. If there are tools that can be tried in a different way, maybe we have to do that to deal with the short term situation. Can we make that a minor addition to the protocol? There is flexibility in how they are tried, but that is my offer, acknowledging the difficulty in moving cows to a different place.

Comment

To respond to that, my concern is how broad that is. I assume you're also talking about bunching cattle and that kind of thing. I would think that would be difficult to require. I like the idea of looking at that idea. I like the idea of department staff coming back to us with some suggestions.

And I like the idea of linking #1 and #14. My concern is that there are so many variables that the previous idea won't help us this season.

Comment

We spent a long time yesterday on range riding and human presence. Are we going to finish that today?

Comment

In response to the concern, there are people in the room here who are familiar with the ground and capabilities of that area. I'm not referring to classic bunching of cattle and all that prior training. But there are ways to have cattle on less of the pasture on any given time. I'm not trying to define anything, but given the time, expense, and social upset of lethal, isn't there a sense of obligation to try something different? I'm not comfortable just saying we're going to leave this to chance. There is an expectation baked in already. In the spirit of this discussion, is it unreasonable to ask the arc of change to continue? Can we ask them to try something different? I'm kind of out of ideas if that's not okay. If there's no willingness to try, I'm telling people right now, you do not get my social license.

Comment

Thank you for that. I can't speak for the identities, but we can take that. We're going to take what all of you are saying and come back with some things we can do.

Comment

There's not enough time for this season for cattle bunching to work. The training of the cows takes too long. I find that to be a challenging part of making it for this year. The other part is that this producer is not asking for any compensation for losses. This producer is just asking for management of wolves. Would it be reasonable to have quicker action in that area? At one depredation, go to lethal. Don't allow the pattern to become a pattern.

Comment

This area is pretty specific to Washington. How do you incentivize a science project? Instead of mandating that someone do something a certain way, how do you incentivize to say, hey will you try this a certain way? Usually it's better to incentivize instead of mandate.

Comment

With another depredation, OPT could go to lethal right away. The Director could go to lethal based on the past 10 months.

Comment

Maybe this is an opportunity to try the ear tags.

Comment

There's no way to get those in time right now. It's too late for this year. They probably take a minimum of six weeks to get in.

Comment

I want to remind people that my proposal was generic try innovations. If there are innovations that aren't possible, that's fine. But there are innovations that are possible. So my question is, where is the line? Is there an expectation that they will be tried or is it simply up to the producer?

Comment

Feels like our energy is low right now. I think that's part of what we're feeling.

Comment

I'm hearing the suggestion, and I'm also hearing the suggestion for WDFW staff to go out. If they're going to do that, they should do it now.

Comment

How many wolves in the OPT pack right now?

Comment

We saw four in our aerial count. There are two collared animals. One is a yearling and one is the adult male.

Department staff left the room to discuss what it would look like if they had suggestions for what to do on that landscape.

While department staff did that, WAG discussed other items on the list. Number 4 was chosen first. It's in regard to the 10-month window.

Comment

I'm comfortable with the 10-month window. Earlier we talked about the 12-month window, and that was too far back for some people.

Comment

The pause and evaluate part of changing behavior. If there's not been problems for months, are the same circumstances in play as there were in October.

Comment

I was going to come in today asking that we change that, but the more we talk, the more concern I have about changing it. I think I'm feeling like I'm okay with it for this year.

Comment

What were the examples of where it occurred right away? Smackout was the end of June or July, right?

Comment

It was later last year on first depredation.

Comment

Sometimes you don't have a problem until you do.

Comment

So the proposal I'm hearing is to keep the 10-month window at this time.

Comment

The Togo was an example that's never a good one. The ones in November could have also been transient wolves. With Smackout, it seemed to occur right under the wire, you might say. Is that really behavior that's carried from one season to the next? It seems hard to parse that one out. Obviously those wolves have been eating other things for months and months.

Comment

I know pulling cows off the landscape can take a while. What is the difference between putting cows out and taking them off?

Comment

It's usually about five months.

Comment

Could having a narrower window that captures end of season and immediate start work? Would that be all right?

Comment

We have some allotments that are 77 days.

Comment

They've been off the allotment for a long time at that point. Could we say that's a pattern?

Comment

With allotments right by it, it'd be tough to say.

Comment

The likelihood of us having a depredation at home is equally as likely as having one on our forest allotment. I don't think we can just talk about allotments.

Comment

I was just going to reiterate that. Some ranches have their home places right near the allotment. The 10-month seems to make sense to me. This is where the department has discretion to evaluate. If there's a depredation that doesn't seem to fit with a pattern, the department won't go to lethal. I can think of examples where the pattern is there even if we have an interruption.

Comment

Producers have the right to shoot a wolf caught in the act, depending on the area of the state (eastern third). So in the situation where predating wolves followed the animals, the producer can do something about it. I don't hear my members say they have an issue with lethal if the wolves are in the act of going after livestock on private ground. That's behavior that's unacceptable. If the objective is to change behavior, and wolves stop eating livestock, it seems 10-months can be kind of an arbitrary window, especially with the problems that occur in late summer. You can have problems that might not carry over. Circumstances can change within that 10-month window.

Comment

I think the 10-month window works is that if you have late fall depredations, then you move the cows out and go somewhere else, then move back in the spring and depredations start again, that's a pattern. That's a pattern even with the time in between, because when cows are in the area, wolves eat the cows.

Comment

If they don't eat cattle for seven months, and then they don't eat livestock for three months, that 10-month window is over anyway. If they eat cows right away, that's the pattern. If they don't go back to livestock, the pattern is broken.

Comment

What if the livestock are on the allotment past the removal date?

Comment

We discussed that yesterday. It would not count towards lethal removal.

Comment

I do understand where the producers are coming from. Sometimes it can leave a very large window. I guess that's where the department has that discretion to make a determination.

Comment

Just for an item of discussion, we've been here once before. What about a period of time that's less depredations, but shorter time. I've never been comfortable with a long period of time. I'm more comfortable with a quick, clear pattern. So it would look pretty quick. What the does capture is a quicker chance to impact pack behavior.

Comment

I think we remember the 10-month window was developed to get rid of the calendar. That's why I think it's a good deal, and it was a compromise in regard to length. I'm still for staying with the 10-month window.

Comment

I think at the end of the day, the 10-month window is a good compromise.

****Group decided to keep the 10-month window****

Comment

Next to discuss was number 15 on the list. This is for investigation protocol and expectations.

Comment

On Oct. 26, we were looking for cows. We found them in a deep dark hole at the bottom of a creek. We came out with one pair. The cow that came out of there had marks all over. We assumed they were bite marks. I contacted WDFW morning of Oct. 27. Didn't hear a reply, so I started down the line. On Oct. 28, I got a call back from the law enforcement officer. He said the conflict specialist was on vacation, but law enforcement would come down to look at the cow. I told him that he knows nothing about a wolf attack, so that would be a waste of time. We both knew he couldn't make that determination. Morning of Oct. 29, we had three WDFW employees come and shave the cow. Found bite marks on the cow. Took a bunch of pictures. That happened, they left. Couple days go by and haven't heard from anyone. Finally, on Nov. 5, I contacted a different conflict specialist for an update. I personally feel like 8 days is significantly too long to wait for a decision. They probably know within 24 hours of seeing the cow. It was still more time before we heard a determination. They did confirm it as a wolf attack 10-plus days later. My opinion is that 10 days is not acceptable, and I think the department would agree. I don't know how to have any sort of consequence. They should have been there the day I contacted them with enough people to do the investigation. We never got the other cow that was lost either. In our opinion, she was eaten by a wolf. We think the reason they were in the hole was because they were being chased and harassed. There is a 24 hour window of them responding in the protocol. I feel we should also add a 24 hour period of having them make a determination.

Comment

The bill proposed in the legislature does have some money in it for more conflict support in that area. Part of the solution is having additional resources.

Comment

The other conflict specialist was only a county away.

Comment

I feel like this isn't the first time we've heard of situations like this. There've been times when the department could have gotten on the ground quicker. I think what's being asked is, what is the consequence for them if they don't follow through, when that's what we've agreed on doing? When the department comes back, I want to hear from them about how they feel about the investigations.

Comment

I think some of the similar concerns about response time resulted in structural changes. One of them was making sure that someone was available. If someone is on vacation, someone else needs to be there. If there aren't resources for additional staff, another conflict specialist should be available. There should always be someone assigned for coverage. There needs to be a contingency plan.

Comment

In the conflict specialist's defense, I didn't call and hear the voicemail. I texted.

Comment

Did the bill pass?

Comment

Hasn't been signed yet, but yes.

Comment

To help with coverage, another resource could be additional wildlife officers employed by the sheriff's department. This person would be hired by money in the bill with authority to do wildlife work.

Comment

I think that's a fine idea for general help, but the protocol does say that a department employee must make a determination in regard to depredation investigations.

Comment

Usually our wildlife officer gets there first and preserves the scene for the department staff member.

Comment

I'm going to go get the WDFW staff members since we have about a half hour left.

Comment

It was suggested to me was that if we didn't hear from WDFW staff within 24 hours it's an automatic confirmed wolf depredation.

Comment

Yeah, we wouldn't be able to be okay with that.

Comment

That wasn't my suggestion, but it was suggested to me.

Comment

It seems like maybe the Director could identify someone who could be the next step for assurances for accountability. It's more workload, or someone's gone, or whatever. You're only able to communicate through text. To have someone you can go to no matter what would be good.

Comment

So similar things happened years ago with cougars in our county. Our game warden, who does our investigations. He's very slow about getting to investigations. When I brought that up years ago, one of the guys at the table said, "Well he's got a supervisor, call him." Everyone has a supervisor.

Comment

You can get a hold of the eastern region conflict specialist supervisor.

Comment

If a producer has to sit on a carcass for two days, and loses two days of time, that's a really big deal. If that's the difference between compensation or not, it's even bigger. I'm unwilling to feel bad for the department on this one. They have to respond.

Comment

The people who come and do the investigation have to get the blessing from above. Even though they have the authority to make the call, not many calls are made on the ground. It wasn't our local people who were the problem. It was the chain of command.

****The department returned to the meeting at this point****

Rob reviewed the timeframe discussion for staff. Then the staff presented what they came up with on range rider expectations.

Comment

We ran out of time and didn't get to everything, so this is partial. Don't expect a complete solution. We approached as we would if we were writing a protocol from scratch.

Started with range rider expectations

- WDFW selects the right range rider who is not influenced by outside things
- Range rider keeping track logs with a GPS and checking in with the conflict specialist
 - Weekly log of that information, including number of cattle
- Don't spend time chasing wolf locations or clusters
- Collect other data on livestock distribution
- Get range rider focus back to the livestock
- Ask Ferry County wildlife specialist to help in area with livestock (camera monitoring)
- One on one meetings with conflict specialist and producer, as well as policy folks (Director, Regional Director, USFS, etc.)
- Increase communication with other agency landowners (DNR, BLM, USFS)
 - Certain restrictions on how cattle are moved through those areas

- Interagency meetings can start those conversations
- Incentives to make things better for neighbors
 - If this producer is having all these issues, incentivize the tools
- Keep cow/calf pairs together
 - Look for strays and missing cows
- Monitoring behavior of livestock to see whether or not they're spooked
- Signage about, "If you see cows, please call this number and provide accurate location."
 - More eyes in the field
- Support for accountability at all levels
 - Everyone has a role to play
 - This is easily influenced by politics, and we all have to do our part to kick that back down to the field level
 - Reach out to these folks now and let them know the plan to handle this situation
- Communicate with producer about salt sites
 - Move salt licks further away from rendezvous sites
 - Clean up salt residue in the soil

Improve effectiveness of lethal

- Three packs in the Kettles
- Togo and OPT are in the window
- Sherman pack doesn't have that window
- So many variables, and so case specific, in all three of those, let the lethal recommendation come from the districts
 - Lethal side isn't contained in prescriptive language
 - If we get there, think about the best approach to make lethal effective
 - How does that affect dispersal of wolves

Part of the reason we have recovery zones in Washington is so we can have source populations throughout the state. If we create a sink in the northeast, that will prevent recovery to the other regions. We want to make sure we don't have this hole all the time.

Comment

I think it looks pretty good for me. I'm still on the fence about focusing on the livestock. Maybe it should be a focus on the wolves.

Answer

We've been doing that so far, and it hasn't worked.

Comment

One or two people aren't going to be able to count those cows and identify which are lost. That's just not practical.

Comment

You don't necessarily need to count every day. You know you have 20 in a spot, then the next day you don't.

Comment

Yes, but they all have a route. You'd be lucky to find four or five by the end of the day depending on the area.

Comment

That last bit in regard to lethal. Sherman doesn't have any depredations. Are you saying that you want permission to go to lethal sooner in that pack?

Comment

With Sherman, we don't have the history, but it's that shared landscape. There might be that feeling that we need to think about that a little different. If Sherman starts depredating, will there be that perception of here we go again. When we were thinking about this, maybe it's making the Kettles an area where we try something different. Maybe there's that flexibility to look at it and see if there's action after two depredations, or three. Having the freedom to think about those things may be something we do.

Comment

I'd preface that statement with saying that we don't expect Sherman to depredate.

Comment

Am I hearing that the suggestion is to go to lethal faster?

Comment

For Togo and OPT, no. They are already in the 10-month window. For Sherman, just wanting that freedom to think differently. Our solutions are range riding improvements and communication.

Comment

If you're going to try new things, it seems like you should wait and see if they work. The protocol calls for the best suited. How does that dovetail with this problem? If USFS doesn't direct the producer to pasture cattle away from the den/rendezvous sites, don't you need time to implement these new ideas and manage the risk? You can't have that trigger set up. It doesn't make sense to me.

Comment

All of these ideas of how to look at these things, we have to run them through the producer and the Forest Service in particular. Cattle are already going out in this area possibly this weekend or next week. These conversations will happen with all involved. We want to talk about it and see if there's something else here.

Comment

You might have noticed my hesitation when you asked us to do this, and it's because of what's happening now. That is a short timeframe for a very small group of us. We want to vet this through our internal group as well. I don't want you to think that we had an opportunity to fully think about these things. I'm not sure we've covered it all. Just wanted to express caution. That's all.

Comment

That wouldn't be going to lethal for OPT at one, that would be going to lethal for OPT at 23. It's not going in at one, is my point.

Comment

I respect that. I think we've clearly communicated that we have these problems. What are we going to do about it? Are we going to start where we did last year? Why are we continually slaughtering wolves there? I'm tired of my summers being ruined, and I'm sure that ranch is too. We have this

cause, now what is the effect going to be? I appreciate the department is between a rock and hard place on this. I'm just looking for answers.

Comment

I really appreciate this list. It's very helpful. I also wanted to acknowledge that we are in the middle of the current protocol and there are a lot of depredations in OPT. I'm thinking about how to get off that treadmill. If depredations start back up again, we're not starting from a clean slate. We're still within the context of the current protocol. So first, I like this list. It gives me some hope that staff would be proactive in talking to producers and other agencies. What happens if we start using lethal again and you can't find the wolves? That's one reason I encourage innovations in other areas, because sometimes even if lethal is there, you can't accomplish it. I'm hoping the intent is for this season. I'm very uncomfortable with going to lethal sooner in Sherman.

Comment

I appreciate that comment. Those are ideas, right? Let's have ideas, then let's talk about them. It's okay if we decide they aren't going to work.

Comment

I know this is just the starting point.

Comment

I haven't heard intense pressure to change our existing protocol other than this mix here and the suggestion to add innovation. Could we add a piece to protocol or just an intent statement from WAG about adding innovative methods where probable and not be too prescriptive on requiring it. I wonder if that works.

Comment

I heard you say not change the protocol, but create a letter of intent that says in areas of high pressure, the WAG encourages the department to go with innovative ideas.

Comment

Yes, and if it's a financial issue, we could try to help with that. Just a statement that we provide as much support as possible, and that we encourage the department to try innovative practices where possible. We can do that and get the intent out, and monitor for next year.

Comment

Yesterday was a very creative day, and I think it kind of dovetails into what was just said. We're an innovative state, and I think we can make it better for everyone.

Comment

I'd be much more comfortable with that than changing the protocol and having a ripple effect four or five years from now because of that.

Comment

The protocol is filled with intent language and suggestions, and the protocol itself is voluntary. A producer can choose whether or not to do those things, and the department will do things based on that. Right now it's not very prescriptive. I'd feel more comfortable with putting an intent statement in the protocol. We say in areas of high conflict, the department commits to being innovative and trying things that haven't been tried. We could even have long term statements in there as well,

saying the department will work with other entities and analyze what those things are. If it's separate from the protocol, it doesn't carry anything.

Comment

I would second that part for another reason. That reason is making the assumption that bill 2097 is signed by the Governor. We'll need some language that needs to be added that way. Then I think you heard from us that we would separate range riding from human presence. I also love the feedback on the Sherman pack. We'll need to work on that, clearly.

Comment

In these high conflict areas, do we know deer and elk populations?

Comment

The best metric we have in these areas is to use harvest numbers. Those harvest numbers fluctuate. They were at record highs in 2015, but they have been down from that the last couple years.

Comment

There's already language that says in areas where we have resource concerns, the department will assess. Also, if federal delisting happens, that's going to be really important. That's a piece of it too. It's not just making things easier in the eastern recovery zone. It's acknowledging that we need to be careful in the other recovery zones.

Comment

Also, in regard to the plan, what does management look like, and how is it different, in areas that are recovered versus areas that are not.

Comment

So I've heard a couple ideas. One was crafting the letter of intent. We have some ideas. Do we ask some to craft that and come back to the group with it? Also, is that language in the protocol or separate? We kind of know the intent of the language, but where should it go? The proposal is to include it in the protocol. Any comments or concerns with that?

****Group decided it should be in the protocol****

Comment

Okay, so who are the people who craft this language?

****Paula was nominated and accepted****

Comment

Can we please make sure that we're looking down the road as far as we can. Let's look at the big picture as best we can.

Comment

Okay, that sounds good.

Comment

Okay, next. What's the right thing to do with the department list?

Comment

Give it to the WDFW Wolf Internal Group for discussion.

Comment

Just wanted to say that Kelly is looking for flexibility with lethal removal. The protocol is guidance, and he's looking for being explicit about that. He doesn't like to operate outside that space, but he's also looking for flexibility because every case is different. Could that also be a statement in the protocol? We don't have to describe those boxes.

Comment

A sentence at the beginning describing the purpose of the protocol.

Comment

If the Director needs to make a decision that departs from the protocol, he just needs to explain it. We want the protocol to be followed as best it can, but if there's a decision outside that, give us the reasons. If the Director, following the law, felt like that decision needed to be made, we just need to be informed.

Comment

The protocol says it was developed jointly, and that it guides the decision.

Comment

At the time, that was the solution, but that time has passed and we need a new solution.

Comment

So we should redraft that intro sentence to state that the WAG provides recommendations.

Comment

We had that in there, and we took it out, but it does not change the authority. And we should have it in there that the Director does have the authority. I would like to state the authority in there clearly. He needs flexibility, and he does have it. We all need to admit it.

Comment

It feels like that's where everyone is right now.

Comment

I wanted to check in with WAG so the department knows what we're going back with. We got a lot from you, which is great. Other WAG members have some assignments. Are you comfortable with a draft protocol from us? Or does there need to be more conversation around some things? What is your expectation? The draft would include everything discussed, but nothing not discussed.

Comment

So for internal member agreements. The department will host a call for WAG members and walk through the protocol when a lethal removal decision is made. There will be an email announcing the time beforehand. We will revisit after a year.

Secondly, if a WAG member has a hard time with a decision that's made, the expectation is to reach out to the other members and communicate that concern.

Third task is that the department will check if there are any concerns with WAG meeting amongst themselves.

In the protocol, the group did not want to specify a distance from rendezvous sites. They will keep the 10-month window. January attacks to not meet the expectation for lethal removal. They do count for compensation. "Avoid...sites" moved to the top of the deterrent list, and numbers will be removed. Better define event, and move that to the definition portion of the protocol. No change to the protocol based on tribal hunting.

Paula will craft a draft letter of intent to be put into the protocol.

Wording needs to be updated in the protocol around language about guidance, flexibility, and Director authority. Director authority should be explicit in the protocol.

Comment

Yes, the department has the authority, but it still needs to be within the bounds of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. I would caution against anything else.

Comment

The one part I react to there is that the plan is not a rule or law. We want to operate inside that, and we'll use it as guidance, but it's not a rule.

Comment

The department will bring the list for #14 to the Wolf Internal Group.

Comment

Split human presence and range riding as well. Add those to the protocol.

The department will draft a protocol and get WAG a copy.

Comment

Would we see this draft at a WAG meeting or in an email to us sometime in between? Then would we get a timeframe to reply.

Comment

In the past, we would email a draft to you and public, and get feedback on it.

Comment

Can we do that with track changes so anyone can see changes being suggested?

Comment

Yes, and we want as much input as possible. We also want to manage all the feedback. So we encourage your constituents to go through you to get those comments included.

Comment

Just wanted to make everyone aware that track changes is challenging for some of us, so just wanted to voice that.

Future meetings over the next year

Rob presented a chart of proposed future meetings and scheduling. Number of meetings that would resonate with WAG members. If it's four, we can spread it around. If it's three, maybe it's February,

May, and November. Rob is looking for feedback. His role is to get advance notice out and get that at least a year ahead of time.

Comment

Do we avoid the grazing season in the middle or do we meet during the grazing season?

Comment

I think there are things WAG can work on during the grazing season that would require less department staff.

Comment

So June could work this year, but next year session would end sooner, so we could have meetings sooner.

Comment

So, we're going down the rabbit hole a bit, but did I hear June for the next meeting?

****There was agreement for a June meeting****

June is not set in stone. Rob will make some proposals and get feedback.

Public comment

Public Comment #1

I just wanted to read this really quick. This is an extremely difficult process and I appreciate the WAG for diving in. Instead of building resentment to each other, you are building relationships. As an advocate for a unification of everyone, we will never get there if we aren't honest. We have all made mistakes. We have collectively come a long way in the state, but there are still numerous self-imposed hurdles. We need to realize that no one in this room is right, and no one is wrong. We would allow ourselves to see that this is an opportunity to bridge the gap between human interests. The only thing that will stop us is us. I have a very unique perspective, and this awards me a massive amount of frustration in conversations like this, only because I have a lot of perspective on what works and what doesn't. If you want, I could answer 95 percent of those range rider questions.

Public Comment #2

I want to say how impressed I am with the department staff. I look at this like an upside down pyramid. You've got all these groups represented by WAG members, and the staff has to deal with all of that. Not just in these two days, but throughout the year. I'm very impressed with how they do it with such grace, and the way they're so open to dialogue and input, and how honest they are. I think it just needs to be said.

Public Comment #3

There's never enough time in these meetings, and I'm pleased that you came up with 15 ideas, and I'm sad you only had time to get through half of them. On the topic of innovation, I just want to point out that we already expect the agency, within the bounds of the law, to be innovative. We also expect those innovations to not stray from science. I would ask the department to be communicative with producers to make sure things being tried are not actually attracting wolves. It shouldn't be a free for all, but we expect our agencies to be innovative. The term stress in the system comes up a lot. I wanted to make note of a couple things. Paula made a note that if wolves are killed in the same area and nothing new is being tried, there will be a lot of public pressure.

Also, with Togo and OPT, we all acknowledge they are starting out with not a clean slate, but my constituents believe that threshold comes from a protocol that needs to be rewritten and revised. If lethal goes through, we would consider that a failure. I would note the same thing with the potential for moving to kill wolves more quickly. One of the things I heard from staff was how could we make lethal removal more effective. For me and my constituents, I don't want lethal removal to more effective, I want it to be not considered. Other innovations that didn't come up are not killing wolves in a trouble spot. When there is more time, and you present a draft for public comment, I suggest you include that as an option. Two more points, I think it's concerning for the public to hear that in a moment of a lethal removal decision it's just so crazy in the field. We understand that you have to have "your ducks in a row." We want this decision to be made through a rational decision making process. We don't want the life of an endangered species to be taken crazily. Whatever we can do to help with that, we are in favor of that. If it's really that crazy, then something needs to change. I know time is limited, and you didn't have time, but I think you mentioned that as a result of 2097, there will have to be language added to the protocol. Is it fair to assume that the language will be in the draft?

Answer

Yes.

Public Comment #4

Fascinating and frustrating to watch from this perspective. I did want to suggest a few things. The conversation going on there needs to be mindful of acronyms and other things like that so the public knows what's going on. Defenders of Wildlife remains engaged in this process, but my name should be removed from the membership roster. When the department convenes a WAG call, make sure there is a public muted line as well. I think that was implied, but do make sure that's there. You can have two drafts, one with track changes and one without. Lastly, Defenders does very much concur with many of the points stated around having an area where there are multiple removals three years in a row.

Check out

Everyone checked out around the room.

Meeting adjourned