

**Wolf Advisory Group
November 9, 2021, Meeting Notes
Zoom Meeting (Day 1)**

WAG members: Samee Charriere, Tom Davis, Diane Gallegos, Todd Holmdahl, Jess Kayser, Bill Kemp, Nick Martinez, Lynn Okita, Dan Paul, Rick Perleberg, Caitlin Scarano, Lisa Stone, and Paula Swedeen

WDFW staff members: Candace Bennett, Ben Maletzke, Staci Lehman, Donny Martorello, Joey McCanna, Steve Pozzanghera, Annemarie Prince, Trent Roussin, and Julia Smith

WDFW Commissioners: Lorna Smith

Facilitation team: Susan Hayman, Elizabeth McManus, and Tristan Marquez

Welcome and check-in

Susan welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda for the day.

Meeting Purpose

Begin the transition to a new facilitation team; share experiences from the summer season; receive an update from WDFW on ongoing wolf policy priorities, Special Focus Areas implementation, and conflict mitigation actions; begin initial planning for 2022 WAG activities; and revisit ground rules.

Comment

It is important to be really grounded in what we are here to do today. Objectives for today are:

- “Begin transition to a new facilitation team.” We do know there is a little bit about figuring out how to work together effectively.
- “Share experiences from the summer season to develop an understanding and appreciation of each person’s success and challenges.” We anticipate hearing that throughout the meeting from WAG and Department staff.
- “Updates from WDFW on policy-level wolf management activities related to topics the WAG has previously advised on or may/will advise on in the future.” We are importantly beginning planning for WAG’s 2022 activities and around the end of the fiscal year.
- “Revisit the purpose of ground rules and identify those that would be beneficial to interactions between WAG members and WDFW staff.” We will look at what was

initially conceived in 2015 and see if those are still on track and meeting needs. I believe the agenda was posted on the website.

Comment

Yes, the agenda is on the [website](#).

Comment

We will finish opening here in just a bit then spend time on the facilitation team transition. We had a great opportunity to have individual conversations with every WAG member (all but two) and we have talked with many WDFW staff members. We have some things we have learned that we want to share and have a conversation about mutual expectations. We want to revisit those work commitments, those ground rules. We are anticipating a break and then receiving updates from the Department. We will then take lunch and come back for additional updates.

At 3:30 p.m. we will have a public comment opportunity, which we will have attendees speak up to 3 minutes per person. Then we will wrap up Day 1 and adjourn to the informal public session. Those of you in the public that want to have an informal session will be able to do that. We will let you know and make sure you are comfortable accessing. Then at 5:00 p.m. we will adjourn. Are there any questions on objectives or the agenda?

No questions

Virtual participant guidelines (raising hands, turning audio off when not speaking, etc.) and technical instructions (how to raise hand and unmute on Zoom as well as through the phone) were provided

Comment

Now let's take look at ground rules. There are 33 listed here. My understanding of these coming to be in 2015 is that WAG members said these are the behaviors that demonstrate respect to us. They make a commitment to operate this way to have a productive, respectful conversation. That is what is up here. In some cases, there are some that are similar, and I can imagine them being grouped up, however, there is value in having things written the way people said them. What I would like members and Department staff to do is identify up to three of these by number and drop into the chat the ones are most important to you for us to track.

WAG members and Department staff provided numbers in chat and the facilitator read them out loud:

Comment

- "Allow time to work through differences." We have a big agenda, but we don't have it so jammed to limit folks talking about things. We will try our best on that.
- "Assume honesty." That is part of assuming positive intent.

- “Not dominating in conversations.” If someone is very passionate about a topic you may hear me say, “I know you have a lot more to say so can you give me a chance to go to other people then come back to you?” Please know my intent is not to shut you down but pause you while making sure there is space for others.
- “Participate & engage.” I cannot imagine you would want to spend this much time if you didn’t want to participate in some way.
- “Patience.” Yes, that is always an important feature.
- “Empathy.” One thing we do by introducing ourselves is to develop empathy and understand people are impacted in different ways by the recommendations you make, and decisions made at Department level.
- “Treat people the way you want to be treated.”
- “Giving people space to talk.”
- “Being respectful.”
- “Make time productive.” Indeed, we will all try our best. If we get through the agenda more quickly, we won’t just hang out. We will end early.

Did I miss anything on the list that is of concern?

No objections

Comment

In a little bit we will come back, and I will ask you to identify what you need to have a productive conversation and we will start to populate a new set of ground rules. They may be the same or something different. Those are commitments to each other, whether Department or WAG members. As the facilitator, I will also ask the public to be respectful of those same things. Unless there is anything else on the opening then we will move into the next agenda item.

No objections

Comment

Let’s move into facilitation team introductions. The facilitation team’s function is to try to enable WAG members and the Department to have meaningful, constructive conversations and so WAG members can provide advice that the Department is seeking. Our job is to help move that along. We put together agendas, meeting processes, and talked to almost all of you ahead of this meeting to have an idea of some things you are thinking about. Some of our takeaways in the intake interviews:

- Where are the conflicts? Where is there opportunity to address these things? What are topics you might be interested in pursuing in the future? Some might be discussed tomorrow.
- You also talked about facilitation team support. When it comes to moving from conflict to opportunity, here are some things we hear from you: The need to rebuild trust. Especially between producers or growers, and the Department staff. That trust specifically between those groups feels fragile to many of you and there might be some more opportunity to build trust back.
- We also hear about the importance of sustaining trust among WAG members. We heard really great news that WAG members largely feel really comfortable working with each other. There are some differences with those who are new – and I don't mean they like you less, they just don't know you as well. So sustaining of relationships and building new relationships.
- We also heard a need to do “level setting.” Always in a group, people have different levels of experience with the content or a different understanding of wolf management and the complexities, what WAG has done previously, etc. We heard there is opportunity to bring everyone up to the same page of understanding work before. Facilitating a robust onboarding process will help with level setting.
- We heard about an opportunity to clarify what the “seats” are on WAG and to encourage filling any vacant seats. Also monitoring and encouraging active member participation.
- We heard about establishing shared expectations; what does listening actually look like? We will be interested to explore what does trust look like? How do you know if you have it? Examine how consensus is working or not. There are specific steps to the consensus process; Is that working? Does everyone understand how it works? What happens if we cannot reach consensus?
- We also heard about the Special Focus Areas (SFAs) and how lethal control is being managed and measured and how to resolve problematic timelines. Thinking about the opportunity to resolve some conflict as there still seems to be some concern around that.
- Address other wolf management topics; We didn't hear anyone say wolf-livestock interactions are not important. They said they *are* important but other things are, too. Address and envision how wolves will be managed after being delisted. Post-recovery plan. Wolf-ungulate interactions. Opportunity to address issues specific to hunters, where we might learn from each other and come to some agreements. Clarify and specify what the Department needs WAG to advise them on. If WAG is not able to reach consensus on something, what happens next?

We had so many great conversations and I think as we go through, we will reflect on themes we heard. WAG members and the Department, was there anything we should have heard from you but I didn't mention?

No objections

Comment

Let's hop into some of the takeaways from what the facilitation team can do for you:

- We heard universally that you expect us to hold people accountable to ground rules (airtime, respectful speaking, listening, operating from standpoint of best intent, etc.). We are happy to do that, and we also hope you hold each other and yourselves accountable. I know our least favorite thing to do is intervene and say, "Hey, what you are doing right now seems inconsistent with the ground rules," but we will do that if necessary.
- Facilitators will help you connect the dots. So, we may say "It sounds like several of you are saying this ____." We will synthesize as you all are talking.
- Facilitating the onboarding process so folks can engage more quickly.
- Creating more useful meeting summaries. I will pause for a minute and ask how many of you read the meeting summaries? What is it about the meeting summaries you most value? What do you use them for?

Comment

It helps clarify decisions that were made and also helps me go back and make sure I understand the points people were making because it is good to be open-minded. In the moment, you hear it, but you don't internalize it. You have to go back and internalize it before you can "get it."

Comment

I find it is a helpful tool with our staff and volunteers so that I refresh in my own mind everything that we covered. Sometimes when you are passionate you hear it differently than it occurred, so I appreciate notes for that.

Comment

It is really helpful to go back and review: what did we actually decide? What was WAG's actual guidance to us? And sometimes you remember some specific things people said but you don't know how it all culminated. Those notes are helpful to us, so it is better to use WAG's words than use ours.

Comment

Going back and being able to revisit what went on and utilize that in the classroom in natural resource classes and outreach to stakeholder groups. I have a classroom of kids

here, so I am operating multiple systems.

Comment

Do you have your classroom watching this right now?

Comment

I do. They can choose to be engaged. It will be playing as they work on other things as well.

Comment

Here is a question for you all: When we look at meeting notes, they are conversational in the sense of they are not 100% transcription but a pretty good characterization of what you said. I understand from previous work and the CCT approach it is really important with your voice being your voice and your words being your words. I would be interested to know if there is any interest in having some sections of synthesis. Synthesis of the comments that were made, then action items we are following up on, etc. Would it be helpful to have those sections a little bit more evident in the summary? Or is it comfortable in this manner? We want to serve you.

Comment

I love the transcription. I think that is an important aspect so do not do away with it. But synthesis would be helpful. Calling out decisions made and then putting things that we could be working on in between meetings and what to be done for program management at a higher level would be helpful.

Comment

We do not want to be those people that swoop in and change everything up, so it sounds like the transcription part of it certainly has a narrative feel to it and it sounds like that is still important. But some synthesis and doing more of that to take a look at things. Clearly, anything we synthesize we do want you to say, "That makes sense." We would look to you to confirm we are on the right track and our intentions yield the outcomes we are searching for. Any objections to doing synthesis, having both in there and seeing how it feels?

No objections

Comment

Other things you asked us to do, and frankly the meeting summaries will help, is help reduce rehashing of previous discussions.

- When you have new members come aboard and they raise topics, those who have been here say that we have talked about this so many times and it is not necessarily right for a new conversation. You would like us as a facilitation team to point out, "There was a decision about that or this advice was provided, do we need additional conversation about that?" If people are not aware if something has

already been discussed and agreed upon, we can track those for you.

- Another thing was maybe just going back to things where you thought there was agreement, and it appears maybe there was not. I think we can help with that in our meeting summaries, and we can say “there was agreement” or follow your consensus agreement process. We can flag those things and then if you say “Wait, no, we didn’t,” that is helpful for us.
- A caucus opportunity to utilize small groups. There is the benefit of everyone hearing everything at the same time, but there is also the benefit of having small groups that can do some work and bring it back to the larger group. There is also opportunity to do caucusing--meeting with like interests or people on your same page in interests. Caucuses are not to develop a war plan. They are a great way to distill a small group’s thinking and bring it back to a bigger group. Also, when we are in webinar form, we can use breakout groups. If you think it is useful, we will figure out how to do that. Sometimes people get involved in a disagreement and they don’t realize they are actually agreeing, so you are looking to us to jump in and say, “I actually think you are agreeing but there is just a little bit you need to focus on.”

Chat: *I have always thought small groups would be interesting in this space.*

Comment

- Get us back to face-to-face meetings. What that requires is all of us being comfortable. Whatever that protocol is, so maybe there are masks or who knows. Nobody suggested anything in particular and neither am I, but that need to get back to face-to-face is really strong for all of you. If it were not for winter, we would just meet outside. We will figure it out.
- The last thing I will touch on from our takeaways is setting a dependable meeting schedule. That is not in any way critical of how you have done scheduling in the past. You all have complex schedules, for example producers operating on timeframes that rely on live animals. Everyone has something that affects them one season or another. Tomorrow we will try mapping out what the next four meetings look like and get those on your calendar. If you need to change then we can talk but starting from solid holds on your calendar rather than tentative is easier to not schedule over.

Chat: *WDFW and State have protocols WAG has to follow...*

Comment

Are you referring to protocols for meeting in person?

Comment

That is correct.

Comment

Thank you for mentioning that. We would need to figure out how that all works. From you all, what are the things that we did not mention there that would be important expectations for us to support you? WAG or Department, do you have anything to add?

Comment

I wanted to mention how much I appreciated having clear objectives. My expectation would be facilitators help us stay focused on those and we all feel like we get things accomplished.

Comment

Sometimes when discussions really get going in our group, there would be a long queue of folks wanting to speak and things would get lost. Someone would say something then someone would bring something else up and the discussion would go elsewhere then the thread was gone. Sometimes it lent itself to everyone just stating our positions on things and not having a dialogue. I know it is a really hard thing to do but if there is a way when we have intense conversation going to keep that thread and make sure the topic gets clarified. Finding a way to make sure the group is functioning and not spending time each saying our own thing without going anywhere.

Comment

Thank you, I think I know what you mean. I am thinking the way we do this is asking, "Are you in this point? No, okay, let's come back to you." We will find ways to find out who is on this topic and get closure before moving onto the next topic. Does that make sense?

Comment

Yes, that makes sense. Thank you.

Comment

I love the idea of memorializing decisions. I think there is more to add such as assumptions that went into that decision. The ground rules we used to make, and those decisions have changed.

Comment

We will definitely take these points and incorporate them into your support in meetings and between meetings. Anything else generally on conflict to opportunity or generally the facilitation support before we think about ground rules or group commitments to each other?

No objections

Comment

I am going to try something that might be new for some of you. How many have used a tool called Mural? What I would like to do is brainstorm ground rules/commitments, rather

than starting with the list of 33 and saying what stays and goes. If this becomes an epic fail, we have other ways. If the Mural does not work for some of you, we can use chat and we can drop your inputs into the Mural board. You should see green boxes.

Your instructions are to identify behaviors that provide an engaging, productive environment. We will group these and bring them back tomorrow. Just click on the little green note and start typing. If you cannot get in, just chat and we will get your notes and put them into the board.

Chat: Can someone address the question about why the public cannot have access to the link? I hope the answer is that this exercise is for WAG members.

Comment

The reason for the public not having access to this is to have the WAG members and Department staff complete the board. By having it on screen you can see, but we are not having the public weigh in about how WAG members and Department interact in this way. Members of public if you are concerned about that definitely let me know. I will give you three minutes to provide a behavior that demonstrates positive, engaging collaboration in meetings and between meetings.

I know that our goal is to make it better and not more challenging. I am going to look at board. I hope we addressed the question but let me know otherwise. Here is what I am seeing on the board:

- “Building relationships and common ground”
- “Being transparent”

If you like the commitment to be transparent, can you say a bit about what that means to you?

Comment

I put that there. To me, it means particularly in a tough decision to put all your thoughts on the table at once and to not continually roll things out. To say, “Here is how I look at it,” and have a holistic 360 view of that issue as opposed to holding something back or changing your mind.

Comment

Thank you. That was a great explanation. Are there any questions or anything to add about being transparent?

No questions

Comment

- “Assume good intent”

By assuming good intent, what does that mean?

Comment

I wrote that. Mainly it is to be gentle with one another if someone says something that may be just out of ignorance. It has helped so much to have people be patient with me because I may have said something that is not what was intended.

Comment

Thank you, that is a familiar one. Are there any questions on that one?

No questions

Comment

- “Treat people the way they want to be treated”
- “Acknowledging when conversations are hard, and emotions are getting heated”

Are there any questions about what that would mean?

No questions

Comment

If we were observing that ground rule, I could imagine as a facilitator I might say something like, “This is really hard, and things are getting heated. Can we take a pause and give people a chance to regroup?” or in some cases it is leaning into the hard. But we would be ensuring a way that is respectful.

Comment

I have observed when we have gotten into heated spots sometimes there is an assumption about an observed behavior and the assumption didn't go to good intent. Someone might say, “Department staff did x,” and someone assumes they weren't working hard enough or weren't being truthful and didn't stop to listen to an explanation or think maybe something else went on. Or something happened with a producer and depredations, and that we all try to get as much info as possible about what happened before assuming the intent of someone's actions. There is what people say and that is important, but I have also noticed that when conversations get heated it is around someone making an assumption about why someone else did something. Making that assumption prior to having all the information. For you guys intervening maybe that is the question to ask: “Do we know everything here and what is fueling this discussion?”

Comment

Thank you, that is really helpful.

- *Added:* “Be curious, seek to understand context before making a conclusion”
- “Not allowing plowing of old ground”
- “Remember that there is a real person on the other side”

- “Listen, be present”
- “Abide by the Golden Rule”

I am from Nebraska, so is the “Golden Rule” also embodied in other things on the screen or what that would look like?

Comment

The Golden Rule is to treat others how you want to be treated yourself.

Comment

That is what we say in Nebraska, too, so thank you.

- “Work with people not in your own ‘in-group’”

I would be interested to know more about that one.

Comment

I wrote that. In whatever group we are in, we gravitate toward “our own,” whatever that means to us. It is really nice to sit next to someone not in your own ingroup or clique, or to not always call the same WAG member you always talk to.

Comment

That is great, thank you. I appreciate the explanations.

- “Interest in each other’s lives and identities”

There are some ground rules in your group that I might never see in others, so I really appreciate these. Is anything missing? I am not asking for a decision, just want you to think about it and see if we can land on a newly adopted set of ground rules.

Comment

I put to “be present.” It seems like in some of our last WAG meetings we hear from certain WAG members all the time and don’t hear from others, so I would like everyone to participate and voice their opinion.

Comment

Part of that is certainly on us, the facilitation team, to keep an eye on who is being quiet and find ways to engage people without putting them on the spot. If we can just take a quick 5-minute break, then we can start in on the updates.

Break

Comment

We often hear about the importance of outreach & education. Sometimes there is not an understanding of what staff does for education efforts, so I wanted to make sure we gave

an update from someone who works in Public Affairs on wolf things.

Comment

I am a communications manager with DFW's Public Affairs department, and my focus area is wolves plus anything in eastern Washington because I am based in the Spokane office. We have done outreach throughout the year, trying to do outreach on wolves maybe every month or 6 weeks, and then in-between. In January, we worked on videos, gave a virtual presentation, and led a discussion about wolves as Wild Washington lesson plan for middle school students in Science Club. These are curriculum during the early stages of the pandemic, so home schools would have materials to use. We have done a couple on wolves that have been well received. In February, we published a blog post titled "[What to Expect when Wolves Expand to your Area.](#)" We push them out via social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and they often get picked up and published by media groups. Then April is about the time the [annual wolf report](#) came out, so we did outreach and a [news release](#) which is fairly standard.

Comment

When you share the links do you mind sharing with everyone so the public can see?

Comment

Yes, thank you. I am sharing to everyone. About the time the annual report came out we did our usual report of that; a news release, social media, and it gets sent to a distribution list of 3,500 people. We also presented the report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission. Then we did follow-up and presented to a lunchtime seminar of WDFW staff, one of our biggest ones yet. In June, we gave a presentation about carnivores in Washington. In July, we published a [blog](#) on wolf howls and what they mean, where some biologists provided me with audio to drop into the blog. In August, we did a presentation on status of wolves in Washington. On International Wolf Day, we did a [blog](#) on how we name packs and history. That was fun because we got to go back into the history in each of these areas. In September, we co-presented on a webinar for Blue Mountain Land Trust on coexisting with wolves. In September, we also presented on wolf management to a junior high in Mount-Baker Snoqualmie. In October, for National Wolf Awareness Week, the 16th through the 23rd, we recommended a wolf reading list for those of all ages. We also worked with our curriculum coordinator that week to put together a Washington Wild curriculum, made a video, and put together an activity for how students can go out and track various animals. That has been the year so far. We also provided interviews to KCVL radio station out of Colville regarding wolf activity throughout the year.

Comment

I am not as computer literate as most, but once we are out of Zoom those links will disappear. How can I get those?

Comment

You can go back through our monthly updates. They are always posted in the monthly updates, so hopefully you all are signed up for those monthly wolf updates. But if you have

an email that is easy, and I will forward them on.

Comment

I don't know if you know the answer, but we have had this Washington Predator-Prey Project study going on. Do we have any updates on that? I checked the website and have not seen anything.

Comment

We are lucky enough to have our science chief in the room, so maybe he can answer that question.

Comment

I am in the room but let me get a more thorough update and come back to you all if I can.

Comment

Thanks so much to our Public Affairs staff member, they are above and beyond working for the cause and we are so lucky to have them. They are always finding opportunities for us and floating ideas. WAG, remember that you are all modes of communication to your communities, so if you have any ideas for an article, I know we are all open to ideas. Some WAG members have already reached out to organizations they are tied to so know that we are always open to those requests. There are Department staff all over the state who can give presentations and our doors are open for outreach.

Comment

Next on the agenda, we have wolf population monitoring. Maybe someone wants to jump in about what they have been up to during trapping season.

Comment

I am happy to jump in. We had a good summer for trapping. This 2021 year we caught 16 wolves, 13 over the summer in 9 packs. Currently, we have collars in 18 of the 24 WDFW-managed packs, so almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of our packs have collars in them that WDFW manages. Those numbers change as wolves disperse and they may change by the end of the year, but as far as management of wolves and getting collars out we do have a lot out. They worked really hard this summer on trapping these packs. Toward the end of the summer, we were doing more of the wolf-livestock management stuff. Most of the trapping occurs end of April or early May through August, or really through July is our best time just because packs move around a bit more.

Comment

I think you did a good recap. Right now, it is a quiet time of year for wolf population monitoring. With hunting going on, we don't typically have cameras out because they tend to get stolen. We pick up our annual surveys after hunting seasons wrap up and continue throughout the winter.

Comment

Do you maybe want to give any hints about some areas of new wolf activity?

Comment

We are always looking and value public insights. Only a few of us are doing surveys but there are a lot of people living in Washington, so new reports we get are helpful. We have had activity in Lake Chelan near Stehekin, some reports south of Lake Chelan up at the upper end of the Entiat. In the Blue Mountains, a new pack north of the Touchet pack and west of the Tucannon has had some interactions with livestock. We are looking on the westside and getting cameras and surveys to find new packs. I cannot tell you how much we value people recreating and hunting on Washington lands, and if you come across any tracks, we have an observation tool online where you can upload photos and put location information. That is really helpful as we get to our winter survey effort to see where new packs are establishing.

Comment

On the new wolf area in Columbia County, we will talk more about that when talk about wildlife conflict. I will wait for after lunch on that one but want to make sure WAG members have the chance to ask questions if they have any. If not, maybe a quick Predator-Prey Project update.

Comment

I scrambled and reached out to Predator-Prey Project folks, so I don't have a whole lot, but field work for the project has wrapped up. We are out of the field, still with some active collars on different prey and predators that we continue to monitor. We and the students have moved into the analysis stage, combing through data and early analysis. No results yet to report, but folks are working on that now.

Comment

Is there a timeline on when the analysis will be complete?

Comment

To be determined. It is a big project with lots of data. Difficult on both our engagement of our scientists and students (masters and PhD level). I don't want to say there are delays but given the size of the data set, they are just starting analysis now.

Comment

I will add that it is not like everything will come out at once. Different portions of the finding will start to come out, so it won't be a giant information dump at once. I know some students are starting to submit papers on maybe smaller portions of project, so as they finish up multiple chapters it will gradually start coming out. We will pass those along as they come.

Comment

Will those publications be on the website? For example, would a student's paper be linked

there?

Comment

I would think once it is published that would be a good place.

Comment

I am wondering, thinking about tomorrow, if there is a time where you can remotely forecast a time to plan for a WAG update just let us know and we will flag it.

Comment

Am I right to think this is an important study? Looking at ungulate numbers compared to having wolves in an area, I think you did Okanogan and Stevens counties, it seems to be a pretty significant study. Are you anticipating getting these results and seeing how wolf population affects ungulate populations?

Comment

I think it is, and hopefully the hours we put into the project show that it is. It is looking at predator-prey interaction but also a student looking at cougar-wolf interactions so predator-predator as well. We also did vegetation sampling so looking at that bottom-up component/nutrition. I don't know how strong the data can speak, but I expect it to be a larger picture. It will be a big story. We don't have results yet, but I assume we will meet and discuss how to tell the story. It is a big project. It is nothing that hasn't been done in other places, but it is important for Washington. It is Game Management Units (GMUs) 117 and 121, so mostly Stevens County and a little bit of Pend Oreille County.

Comment

I put a [link](#) in the chat for everybody to see the University of Washington page that has a lot of Predator-Prey Project information.

Comment

Thank you, Commissioner. Are there any other questions about the Predator-Prey Project at the moment?

No questions

Comment

Maybe right after lunch we can do wildlife conflict updates. Beyond talking about wolf-livestock conflict, I know the District 1 team is on the call and will be able to update us on SFAs and how that went this summer. That will be a good place to start after lunch.

Lunch break

Comment

I will hand it back to you, Julia, as I think you had teed up depredation activities.

Comment

Yes, just general wolf-livestock conflict. There is generally a lot to cover. We had an ongoing situation in Togo over the summer and in the Blue Mountains right now that people would be interested in. We would like to welcome District 1 to talk about SFAs (Special Focus Areas).

Comment

Thank you. I will start with SFAs in District 1 then down to District 3. We got a late start on SFAs last year and it was extremely challenging. We thought we would get a lot of producers in the same room and have discussions, but as people know, things happen. Sometimes you don't even get families to agree, let alone different producers. Last year we worked with range riding. We have Department-contracted range riders, range riders who work with cattle producers through NEWCC (Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative), etc. In an SFA in Togo last year, we had miscommunication. Riders were not communicating. In January, I started monthly meetings every month until grazing season, so then there was a lot of communication every month. We had Forest Service, Cattle Producers of Washington (CPoW) representatives for their range riders, we had NEWCC, and we had county specialists. We started with a draft of allotments being grazed on, and the Forest Service was a great help. From January onto spring, there were some vacant allotments that no one was grazing so no range riders were needed there. We coordinated with NEWCC and CPoW about which range riders work for which producers, on which days, etc. Our district biologists looked at high wolf sites and continued to coordinate all information to range riders and producers. That is how it started last winter.

When we moved into meetings with producers, we found out quickly that meeting together in a room was not going to happen and we weren't going to sing Kumbaya. We scheduled with individual producers. In a majority of them CPoW was represented, Nuke was represented, and a county specialist was in the meeting too. We talked ear tags, range riders, pilot projects, cowbells, and who is willing to do what. We had one producer willing to do 15 and another do 18, another 27 cowbells and 32 collars, and another 20 VHF ear tags. As we got into the nuts and bolts, we realized we need to do more training on our ends for producers and range riders to learn how to use that equipment. For example, how do you flip from one frequency to another? More education hands-on is needed.

Another issue we ran into is cattle rubbing against trees and losing ear tags. A lot fell off. We plan on meeting with producers who utilized those over the grazing season and find out if it was effective. One problem we've come across now is producers are taking cattle off the range, trying to get them in and sorted and sold, ship yearlings off, do preg testing, etc., so they are extremely busy. A lot of ear tags did fall off. Also, once some got out there, we asked them, "Could your range riders keep a log? So, on x day we used the VHF tag to spot cow X, Y, and Z." Some were fine but we got pushback from one producer as there was a trust issue. They thought, "If we give the Department data it will be used against me." All different perspectives on if it is going to work or not. Range riders said it was useful, but some said the equipment is extremely tough, so we are trying to get

user-friendly-in-the-field antennas. Because of Covid, those weren't available so we were borrowing from other staff members to find what we could use. Thanks to Department staff input over the SFA on the wolf and ungulate sides of it, we came to a good draft. Another thing we learned is we need to have one owner of the document (plan) internally who will follow through to the finish. That is one thing we didn't do very well and maybe it should've been me to take the lead on that. Field staff are busy. Are there any questions so far?

Comment

As said earlier, while these things are happening there is a rumor train going on so now is the time to ask questions. You have all the experts on the call here so ask the questions. And if there aren't any, maybe some of the district team members can talk about their role and lessons learned.

Comment

It is not a question so much as I wanted to say thank you, because that was really helpful. Since I live in the northeast, I have heard every rumor, and most are not favorable to the Department. It was really nice to get this explanation and if you could figure out a way to give information to the public it might help explain things so that there is more in-depth understanding of what happened in the summer.

Comment

One thing we always like is producer buy in. With the Department that has always been an issue. Through the summer in the Togo area, Stevens and Ferry County specialists have a lot of contacts there. They reached out to us to see if there are range riders they can use for producers they are working with. That is positive because maybe they don't trust the Department, but they have that trust locally with someone else.

Comment

Along those lines, I was wondering if we could have dialogue with Department staff and producer representatives on the call and just comment on what you think the efficacy of the range riders truly is in regard to helping reduce conflict. I am just curious to hear dialogue between the two sides there.

Comment

I had a couple of questions. You said getting producers in one room wasn't going to happen. Can I ask why? I think that was one of the things that WAG very much wanted; to be a group approach on an SFA and get everybody on the same page. I hear you say that the producers say it couldn't happen. Can you tell me why?

Comment

We definitely tried to get everyone in the room, but we learned quickly it wasn't going to happen. I don't want to go into detail but there are certain rifts where people don't get along well. We had the same discussions with different producers, and we encouraged them to come together in one room to talk about possible solutions and opportunities.

They were unwilling to do that. Our next step is to meet with them individually, with CPoW and the Sheriff's Office.

Comment

So it wasn't a scheduling conflict, but it was a conflict between people?

Comment

It was a combination of both.

Comment

I am just trying to figure out why it didn't work the way WAG intended it to work. I have heard from the rumor mill and by one producer that they were told there was consequences if they didn't do as they were told. They were threatened their Forest Service permit would be in jeopardy. That is not something that we were told in WAG about lethal control. That SFA attachment was a recommendation of WAG and to have it come back that the Forest Service permit was in jeopardy... Could you respond?

Comment

I have not heard that. That is not something we would say. I forgot to include that the Forest Service was included in those meetings too. I cannot remember a Department or Forest Service staff saying a producer's Forest Service permit was in jeopardy at any time. That is news to me.

Comment

The only thing I heard you talk about that was done differently was tracking tags. The collars and cow bells were already done, so anything new in the SFAs?

Comment

Nothing other than tags and collars have been done. Once we start having depredations the frequency rate was bumped. But I believe it was uploaded to four fixes per day and would download every other fix, so from 2 to 4.

Comment

So that is what was changed in the wolf collars?

Comment

Yes.

Comment

I thought the frequency had to be set when the collar was put on the wolf.

Comment

I think it depends on the collar as far as what is programmed into it.

Comment

One of the vintage collars we have (the newer is iridium) upload every other fix. But we can change the number of fixes per day, so in this instance, 4 fixes per day so it uploads to every other location. It is the upload to the satellite that is fixed from the factory.

Comment

You can change it and turn it down to save battery life when cattle are off the allotment?

Comment

Yes, we can reduce the number of locations that it tries to get per day. We cannot change whether it uploads to the satellite – that is fixed to every other location.

Comment

Knowing these were going into SFAs, we put newer collars in there. These are discussions we have had to increase fix rates if depredations started. We basically turn the collar up right away as soon as depredations started. That was discussed in meetings with producers. Each time you change the fix schedule, you can kind of mess up the collar and lose it for a few days, so we try not to change the fix schedules a bunch in fear of transmission corrupting the collar and losing it. Only when absolutely necessary, but we did do it in the SFAs this summer.

Chat: Can you remind everyone which pack or packs were designated as SFAs this season?

Comment

That was the Togo pack territory.

Comment

Coming back about the collars, did you have follow-up questions or thoughts? Then we will swing back to other questions.

Comment

No, that was all my questions.

Comment

I am trying to think how to say this. I have had conversations with producers in the northeast and I have heard a number of issues. I don't think they are all rumors. They all lead to greater complication or greater challenge for Department staff in working with some producers as the trust factor isn't enhanced and is in some ways made harder. It also reveals the fact we don't have a member of WAG that is a northeast producer – and I know the challenges – in discussions like this. We don't have someone in that part of the country where most wolves are. It harms our discussion because we are not getting detail from producer perspective. Something needs to be done and I want to encourage the Department to move on that. There was an incident with Togo where a state legislator got on a radio station in Colville and expressed frustration, then Department staff later got on

the radio and disputed what the legislator said. I don't think that was helpful. I don't know if it was approved by Olympia or the regional office, but that sends a signal as well. There were some things going on over the summer that made these local conversations more challenging, in spite of hard work staff is doing. I don't think we can overlook that as we try to get producers to work with the Department.

Comment

I want to invite WAG to contemplate how information gets validated. I am hearing people say, "We heard this from neighbors or other producers." If you are hearing things in opposition then how do you determine where to get information you are confident in?

Comment

We are in contact with those producers all the time. We had one newer producer up there work with us. He moved his cattle to three different pastures to avoid wolf-concentrated areas there and we just weren't seeing depredations. We continued to hear that they were harassing the cattle, but we decided there were no depredations there. As we saw more high usage areas over the summer, we would relay to the producers, "maybe move cattle to this portion of the pasture," and try to have that open communication. It is not always going to go well. We just try to do our best when we are out there and provide honest and upfront information.

Comment

My respect for you continues. I don't disagree with anything you said. The things that I talked about, though, you didn't address. But the fact is it is great to hear the work the Department does with the producers and the examples are helpful.

Comment

I am sorry I didn't address it, but that is just not in my wheelhouse.

Comment

There is a lot there. For the question that was asked about which packs were considered an SFA – technically before it was just Togo then it was Kettle then throughout monitoring our wolf biologist saw it was just a pack running in Togo territory, so Kettle wasn't really a functional pack. We started with two, but it ended up being one.

For the other concern, having a northeast livestock producer on WAG has been something we want to do. Bluntly told, they weren't interested. The door is open. We always ask folks to apply, so it is not for lack of trying. I understand why people do or don't want to be on WAG, as it is complicated and difficult. That is ongoing and if you know anyone in northeastern Washington who is interested, we are all ears.

We heard about the radio interview and our Public Affairs staff was contacted about that interview. There is so much in the media about the agency's actions on wolf conservation and management. This is not a unilateral decision. It is many of us in the agency who work on wolves and talk through how to respond. It is important to try to do some outreach and

education, to address the things in the rumor mill. Yes, we don't always agree on how things lay out. Naturally we disagree but I personally think it is our job to get on and talk about what the agency did and why it was done.

Comment

She says the door is open and the Department wants a northeast Washington producer. Any contacts to facilitate that?

Comment

Possibly. I have heard of two individuals that are interested, at least of last week. Thank you for the confirmation of the radio broadcast. Clearly that is a critical decision, and I am thankful it went through proper process to happen.

Comment

I wanted to hear dialogue in regard to pieces of conflict management.

Comment

Range riding is the best tool that we have for minimizing conflict right now. Does it always work? No. In my experience, once any animal becomes habituated to any activity, it stops working. Range riding is no different. Once animals get used to a person running around on a four-wheeler or a horse, they lose concern. As an example, there is a guy who runs a skid steer that has a mower on the front, and it is super loud. The wolves got to where they didn't care. They killed a calf right next to it. He was up there every day in different areas, and it quit making a difference. Range riding is no different than that. The best part of range riding, in my opinion, is the ability to keep the cows somewhat grouped up and keep eyes on them. That is the most effective part of having a person on the ground in any sort of frequency. It is not as much to keep the wolves away from the cattle but keep the cattle able to defend themselves and be seen. That is my experience with range riding.

Comment

We don't have confirmed wolves in our areas, but I would agree. Whether it be two-legged predators or four, someone watching over things keeps a better hand on the pulse of the animals. The more out there the better off you are.

Comment

I cannot speak from the producers' perspective, and I think what was said I would largely agree with, but I also think we don't know a lot about systematic ways in which range riding is really effective and the ones where it is not. I think we have gathered a lot of the on-the-ground piece of the puzzle (collectively, the Department range riders, and CNW's range riders, and CPoW's range riders). I know some would probably be saying, "What are we doing get a more systematic picture to answer that very question?" There is an opportunity that has arisen to systematically analyze the process of range riding. There is a conservation innovation grant through NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) that got funds, so they are working with wildlife services and Utah State University with

range riders and practitioners and producers throughout a multistate area, and CNW is participating in that. We are talking to the people designing the study and trying to figure out getting enough range riders and producers in Washington to participate in a multi-year study to figure out what makes range riding effective. I think it is a great opportunity. The first full season of the study is the upcoming 2022 grazing season, so if anyone wants to chat about participating, we certainly have a consistent group of ranchers over the years. It will not just be Washington but other places as well so we can refine the approaches and the techniques. We spend a lot of public money paying for range riders, so it is going to be helpful to collect more systematic data on the topic.

Comment

We have been asked to participate in that too, and we will. As range riders, we look at what is going on in the field. Is livestock scattered everywhere? Do we need to get them grouped up so they can defend themselves? There was a situation in Leadpoint this summer where the calves and the cows were going into lower-level pastures and wolves would pass through those stringers. In the evenings they would spend time in the stringers, so they are grouped up. We look at each situation and see what each range rider should be doing while they are out there.

Comment

I wanted to go back to Togo from this summer and address issues. There were concerns expressed over the media and the Department's response. We didn't touch on the fact that there was a lethal removal authorization from the Director in Togo and the reminder that the Department relies very heavily on the literature and on the research associated with the effective period within a 14-day window of depredation activity. That is a significant aspect of our response. Another thing that has been discussed in WAG is I would look for WAG's support and utilization of information that the Department provides based on the objective of a lethal removal authorization or attempt. The objective there is to change pack behavior and ideally break a pattern of depredation activity; to minimize both livestock loss and wolf loss. We understand there has been frustration, disappointment, and concern from the northeast community as it surrounds the lethal removal efforts in Togo. The Department spoke to the lethal removal effort and the fact that we were looking very importantly at the 14-day window as well as the activity conducted around the lethal removal operation having an impact on behavior and the fact depredation had not continued. While we provide that message, it is not resonating in the local community. We understand but it is important for us to provide that information and remind the public about our actions and lethal removal. It is not simply measured with if a wolf is killed or not. Have we been able to stop an apparent behavior? Have we been able to impact the behavior of that pack and stop depredation activity? That seemed to be a topic of media conversation and information we tried to provide in response to local concerns.

Comment

Thank you for those comments. The way some people think about it is the issue of trust again. You guys all know this, but it speaks to the need long-term for a third party to step

in and handle lethal removal operations. Maybe I am in fairy land, but I would love to see that taken off Department staff and onto a third party, like maybe wildlife services. That would help with trust issues that I keep hearing about.

Comment

I would love to note that and have future conversation about other ways to address that need for information and concern that the community has around that.

Comment

To keep the cattle bunched up and easier to defend or defend themselves, I agree with. Sometimes you have to be careful about fixing one problem and causing another. The environmental issue, as far as overgrazing in certain areas, may be an issue in the future if we keep all cows in the same spot. Would they discourage that over an extended time? We taught these cattle how to disperse so that is an issue as well.

Comment

I think that is a concern. I am not talking about putting a bunch on one area, just not stragglers so they can defend themselves. But I completely understand.

Comment

I appreciate your report and you mentioned resource challenges in Covid. I am curious as to whether the Department feels they have the resources they need to support producers during grazing seasons. Are there equipment shortages or things you are feeling challenged by that we should know about and provide support?

Comment

Our plan this summer was to hire two technicians, one for each specialist in northeast Washington. We did interviews, and people came back and turned down the position. The positions opened again, and the same thing happened. This was an extremely hard time to hire staff. We started recruitments so staff would be on-the-ground in May and June and had no luck. We will try again this year. They were two 6-month seasonal positions, so we reviewed and are thinking of hiring two full-time positions instead. Hopefully, full-time instead of career seasonal would be a lot better.

Comment

I want to list out some things so that WAG has an idea of what is on our minds. Maybe before we leave SFA discussion, I want to give the district team time to talk about lessons learned. We would be remiss if we didn't talk about the situation in Columbia County. It is ongoing, so we owe the public and WAG an update there. Then I have wolf policy updates for you. The conflict may hit closer to your world than policy, but it is also important to talk about policy, rulemaking, and post recovery.

Comment

I am one of many on the district team. Lessons learned: we were really late establishing an SFA. This year we are starting the process a lot sooner, so December. Our goal is the in-

person meetings. One reason for the problems last year was producers were already turning cattle out. We are going to start the process earlier now and assign a lead for it. We need one lead person to follow it through.

Comment

Our biggest hurdle was time or getting started early enough. That seems to be a common theme year to year. Sometimes we get better and sometimes we don't. We will keep trying. The only other thing is potentially those types of ear tags weren't the right ones. Maybe we need to explore other technologies.

Comment

In place of ear tags?

Comment

They can still be ear tags but maybe you don't need to learn radiometry to use them. Or if many fell out, we find a new way to attach them. We will have more conversations with producers and each other.

Comment

On part of pilot projects, we did focus a lot on ear tags in SFAs. In some areas I worked, we put ear tags on collars with information from the Washington State University study. Yesterday I looked at lead times for ordering some equipment, but because of Covid that was one issue we had about getting products. Lead times are still going to be an issue until we are hopefully on other side of this pandemic. I think that will still be a challenge this upcoming year.

Comment

I want to remind WAG if you have any ideas or have anything outside the box, please relay them to us and call us. We are open for new ideas, so please let us know.

A little history on Columbia County; there is a new pack in this area down there so a good job was done reaching out to producers for cost-share range riding. We also offered data sharing, and I think two out of six producers accepted that. Everyone else was word of mouth. Columbia County has a lot of private grazing pastures. Northeast Washington is dealing with vast U.S. Forest Service allotments, and in the Blue Mountains it is private timber allotments and not a lot of pasture availability. Our staff looked for pastures on our end, but for contract range riders we looked all summer and were unable to find anybody. Our HQ conflict staff has set up meetings in December so we can revisit that with range riders we have and range riders that quit this summer because they didn't agree with the RFQ (request for qualifications). Conservation Northwest helped with range riding in the Blue Mountains and cost-shared, too.

Comment

Thanks, I think that is a good start. I wanted to bring up this area we have had wolf-livestock incidents this summer. We didn't know of a pack in there, even with the annual

report in April. We got the first confirmation of wolves utilizing this area in May and then a couple of pictures in June. In July, we had multiple animals but weren't sure if it was an offshoot of the Touchet pack. We were able to put a couple of collars out in August. Then we started to understand that this is its own group and activity center. Through the process, we worked with producers down there to share information, but it was something that evolved over the summer. It is not like we had a known pack and could get range riders in there from the beginning. We were chasing our tails reacting to new activity in this area. We had the issue with not being able to have full-time range riders in the area. It wasn't a lack of effort, but we ran into roadblocks to have daily range riders on pastures. Some pastures we did have that activity and folks had resources to do that and others did not. We ended up with four depredation events in this pack area, one on August 25, September 13, October 16, then November 1. Some of those were older events and older injuries so we had to go through and look at timing of those events in relation to those animals.

Comment

I was wondering if you think the drought and fires in that area have had impact on wolf activity in that area.

Comment

This area where these depredations are and where this pack is didn't burn this summer. I think the drought definitely had impacts on animals and where they spend time in the summer, obviously gravitating toward where forage is available. Fire can obviously impact movement, so they will seek out green areas. This area particularly wasn't in the middle of the fire, but it certainly was nearby. Wolf packs use a large landscape so some of these packs down there were certainly influenced by fire, down in the Blue Mountains. This particular pack was probably not influenced by fires but by the drought for sure.

Comment

I would add that conflict staff are continuing to work with producers in that area, so there will be livestock in that area throughout the winter, though not as much as there during the summer months. We do have prospective candidates that are being informed about the contract period opening for applications and we will work with them to get their applications.

Comment

You said you would inform potential prospects that could be contracted range riders when the next contract period opens, but if there is a need for it now, I am just wondering about the logistics of waiting for the next contracting period. Why would there need to be a delay? Why couldn't they be hired on immediately to provide range riding services to producers who still have cattle out there?

Comment

I was working to see if we could get range riders in that area, and I checked with our contracts manager who is the authority about what amendments we can make to an RFQ.

Unfortunately, we couldn't make an amendment to that language, but it will allow us to be better prepared and have recruitment more comprehensive statewide. Does that make sense?

Comment

It does, but it poses quite the problem. I know it is not your fault, but I am perplexed at the inflexibility and wondering from a problem-solving perspective. Maybe you can help as a regional director but if there is a need and there are people, shouldn't it be whatever needs to be done to bring them on? Maybe they are not willing to work under the contract terms and maybe that needs to change or maybe the RFQ needs to change. But having to wait until the 2022 grazing season when there is a need now...? We work hard to make sure you have funding to hire enough range riders, so that shouldn't be an obstacle, especially when you have found someone when it has been so difficult thus far. Department, can you respond to that?

Comment

Several have us have worked with Contracting. The RFQ was already amended once this year already, so they don't want to amend it again. I will work to see if we can move it forward, but as of now, we were told "no."

Comment

I don't know how many of you know, but I am the most majorly affected producer with the Columbia pack. It is affecting me personally. Early on when we knew there were several pack members, it was called it out that a range rider was needed. I said I cannot be here every day as they are an hour away from my house. I make it a full day every day I go down there. I did the best I could to make presence down there, but I called out early we need a range rider. They were unsuccessful in finding one, so we did the best we could. The neighbor did the best he could and drove up through my cows to his place. It didn't seem to make a difference when we had a person there because we still had depredations.

I would be happy to answer any questions about this pack. I am a willing producer, and I will move the cows. I have heard the unwillingness to the Department, but I will move them, I just need a place for them. I need you to understand those options aren't always there. There just wasn't a place to take them to. It is affecting me and costing me a lot of money, and there are impacts to the industry not being recognized. I have pointed out to law enforcement and the Department the things that have direct effects back to producers. Those calves with scar tissue, they are inedible. If there is scar tissue, purchasers will not buy cattle out of the northeast of the state. It is going to cost money in the end. I know the Department has danced around who the affected producer is, but I am not afraid of it.

Comment

Thank you for sharing with us and talking to us directly about your experience. No one else can know what that is like, so it takes courage and vulnerability to talk about your

experience, so I appreciate you and what you have done. I know it has been a difficult summer for you and I feel like this situation is a classic one where it is not for anyone's lack of trying. I know Department staff worked hard and you have worked hard, but sometimes you just can't find range riders. What are you supposed to do? These situations are more shades of grey than black and white. I want to give an update on the recommendation process, but after WAG members ask any questions that they may have.

Comment

My question is to the Department. Is there one person in the Department where, for livestock conflict interactions, the buck stops with them? Other than the Director.

Comment

It should be a simple answer, but it is not. What do you mean the buck stops with them? There is a conflict section manager, but it is complicated.

Comment

In my world, there would be a general manager or vice president in charge of a group and if something wasn't getting done, they would be in front of the press to answer why things didn't get done. I am just curious if there is the same level of accountability in the Department. One person who says, "It is my job to make sure enough range riders are out there. We looked at all these depredations and looked at new ideas on the horizon to determine the efficacy of range riders," etc. Is there one person who has the scope to be accountable and responsible for it?

Comment

Yes and no. It depends on the region. You have a regional director of each region and I think within their region they are that, but then you have me who is a wolf policy lead who looks at things statewide. And others are more knowledgeable about direct compensation and other things. Decisions for whether or not lethal removal happens lies with the Director. But for who is the go-to guy or gal on this, it is complicated. Producers work with wolf conflict specialists, the wolf policy lead, and resources outside of the agency.

Comment

I felt like it was a matrix answer and sometimes that is hard.

Comment

Your question reminds me of one of the interviews we had where a WAG member asked if there could be a conversation that would show the different pieces and where decision lies between the Governor's Office, the Department, the Commission, the public, etc. That could be an interesting relationship map to build, so thank you for raising that.

Comment

To finish this out, if I could do an update on the internal recommendation process related to lethal removal: You all are probably familiar that the district team is involved in this and have to go through all on-the-ground information (what is going on with wolves, with

livestock, what do we know) and staff craft a recommendation. That recommendation goes to the regional director then to the Director. Each step folks can ask for more information. Because these wolves in this area have passed that three in 30 and four in 10 months in the wolf protocol, do we move forward for lethal removal? That recommendation is in the Director's hands. He is the ultimate decision maker.

Comment

Any notion of when WAG might hear about that?

Comment

The non-answer, which is frustrating, is I think soon. I am not going out in front of the director, but I would imagine soon.

Comment

It has been an extremely frustrating thing. The last depredation investigation before today was last Monday, then the time the team needed the recommendation to do their paperwork. But it is like beating the puppy two days after he pees onto the floor. We continue to drag this out. With no action, that means it changes nothing for the next grazing season. We will be in the same boat. I am really frustrated.

Comment

I don't want to ignore her frustration. I want to openly acknowledge it. It is a super frustrating situation, but it is something we have to do. Lethal removal, whether you choose to pursue or not, is a big deal. We want to do our due diligence and make sure we are moving forward after considering all facts, to preserve and protect that tool that we think is important sometimes. I know it is frustrating and I am sorry for that.

Comment

I do recognize it is not a decision to be taken lightly. Even though I don't want it to be that way, I do recognize it. This group has been frustrated about the amount of time to move from Point A to Point B. I see both sides.

Comment

For future conversations, what might be different? What is in this groups' ability for recommendations? Thank you so much. That was an important, challenging conversation.

Break

Comment

Back to the situation in Columbia County, I forgot a key piece of information. Can you tell us about recent mortality incidents?

Comment

On Friday evening, we had a call from a reporting party that there was a dead wolf on the side of the road. One individual, a yearling female, was hit by a car from that pack. So

there is one less wolf in that group, but it was an uncollared wolf.

Comment

That information has been shared with the Director as well, so he knows about it in whatever decision he comes to. I am going to jump to wolf policy project updates if we are done talking about conflict.

Comment

I would like to know what the Department is going to do to help the situation in Columbia County as far as getting range riders. What is the process going to be?

Comment

As heard from others, it shouldn't be an obstacle, but it is an obstacle. Folks can correct me, but livestock are going to come off when the snow flies. I hate to say it but maybe we do the best we can, but we cannot commit to providing a range rider if we are not sure we can do so.

Comment

I want to acknowledge how bureaucratic and awful our answer sounded. There is no way around that. I made a couple of calls on the break and I am not saying we are going to be able to get the hire done, but I have asked for folks to consider the fact we have an individual available. A contract amendment has been made previously, so an amendment is not possible. I am looking for options here to get someone on the ground as soon as possible. I don't know we can provide anything, but I wanted to let you know how awfully bureaucratic our response sounded and I am trying to see what can be done. Maybe there is some stone that has been unturned, so we are looking.

Comment

It might be helpful to understand what the Contracts' problem is. Do they have laws or regulations to prevent them from doing this? A few years ago, we changed the WACs (Washington Administrative Codes) around direct compensation after hearing issues producers were having. If there is legislation, maybe we can change it, so this doesn't happen anymore. We just don't know, so if you could help us understand that we can figure out how to help or prevent this happening again.

Comment

My short answer is I don't know what the obstacle is. But let's try to understand it and whether it is something we can work around or change in the future.

Comment

I also can't say more to the specifics of what Contracts' limitations are, but we do plan on revising the RFQ to look at it again and make adjustments.

Comment

It sounds like we are looking at long term solutions and thinking about how to make the

RFQ more flexible. Is there anything else on that note before we get to policy things?

Comment

Are you getting action items for this? And is there going to be follow up? It seems like there has been a never-ending discussion on the livestock interaction problem. People are working hard but I am wondering if we need to start at ground zero and find better way to tackle the problem.

Comment

We are tracking action items for sure, and that is something we will share out. We will talk about it tomorrow and note to come back to the contracting piece of it.

Comment

I am not talking about contracting per say, I am talking livestock-wolf interactions and in a more holistic way having someone responsible for it. Sometimes matrix organizations work but when you have something complicated and need accountability, you need one person instead of three or four. I am hearing all signals that we aren't executing this in the right fashion.

Comment

Absolutely. We will get notes put together and to be able to identify issues with current protocol and whether there are things to advise the Department on. We are happy to tease this out and thank you for bringing it up.

Comment

We have an ongoing rulemaking effort we are working on that has been a huge undertaking for the Department. I will go back to a place where we last visited with wolf-livestock deterrence rulemaking. Back in the meeting with the wolf committee on April 5, we went through notes from the 30+ intake calls that we did with folks, presented alternatives, and provided recommendations to the wolf committee (all that background information is online). At that point, we received the go ahead from the recommendations and staff-initiated work on potential environmental impacts and began working on SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act). Concurrently, staff met weekly for two hours for 3 or 4 months to discuss rule language, put ideas together, and do environmental analysis.

During that time on July 6, we provided a presentation on rulemaking efforts, timeline, etc. Afterwards, we had stakeholder meetings. We reached out to stakeholders to talk about rule ideas and the SEPA alternatives. At the end of the day, we held 9 stakeholder groups that were usually a group of individuals. We reached out to many more groups than actually chose to participate in those meetings. There are notes from these meetings and they will be part of the rulemaking record. At the December 2nd meeting of the Wolf Committee (Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission), I will present the current draft of the wolf-livestock conflict deterrence rule. At this meeting, we will seek the Wolf Committee's guidance about whether to move forward to the CR-102 stage with the full FWC with the language as proposed. Agendas change, but that is plan now. We are still on track, given

all steps with the Commission go forward. We are on track to file the CR-102 in February, which would put briefing in April and decision in May. Remember, all of that depends on Commission steps.

SEPA analysis has been underway for a while, to analyze environmental impacts of rulemaking, supplemental to the final environmental impact statement completed for the wolf plan. This is just a supplemental analysis on top of that. It is not released yet. We were hoping to have it out already but, as you know, things have gotten busier for me. I am hoping to have that out with the Wolf Committee Meeting, but that document needs to go through internal review. Depending on what the rule says, a small business economic impact statement (SBEIS) can be done or not. We opted to do one regardless of if it is required because the rule will impact livestock producers. We don't have the in-house expertise to complete the SBEIS analysis but should be underway within about a week. Contracts take forever to get going, but I believe the start date is November 17 and that it should be completed by the time the CR-102 is filed. Does anyone have any questions on that?

No questions

Comment

I know that it is a team of staff that has worked on this effort, not just me. There is combined wolf and wildlife conflict experience who drafted this. I am proud of our team who worked hard on this but just wanted to note this was a team effort.

Moving on, another big project you need to be aware of and follow is the periodic status review. You first heard about this at end of 2018. WDFW periodically reviews status to determine if a listed species continues to warrant its status or deserves to be delisted or reclassified. Although listed species are supposed to have status reviews every five years, wolves have never had a status review since their listing as endangered in 1980. WDFW filed the CR-101 announcing periodic status review of wolves in 2018. This review will be an update of the status report, whether they should be reclassified or not. We want to use the best science. It is not a political decision. WDFW opted to contract with a fantastic team of three smart folks at the University of Washington on the wolf population model. It has taken time but there is an update planned for the Wolf Committee (not full Commission) for November 19, first thing in morning at 8:00. You will see the full presentation from that team. From there, the agency will decide what should go into the periodic status review; if there is anything new to wolf listing status or not. We have not internally received data from this, so we are in the same boat as far as knowledge there.

Comment

Are there any questions on that periodic status review?

No questions

Comment

I have two more updates. For post-recovery planning, I want to be transparent. In our July meeting, I shared the draft matrix of alternatives for post-recovery plan and ideas. I know you had a homework assignment about what you were most interested in WAG. I have not done anything with the post-recovery plan since that time. As you know, we have had changes in the wolf policy lead position, so rulemaking flipped everything on its head. It doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about it in WAG—we can talk about it more tomorrow, but I think this is a time for WAG to have discussions queued up in July. For me and what documents we are authoring as far as environmental impact statements (EIS) go, I am working on rulemaking right now. I think that makes it an ideal time for WAG to talk about informational needs. That will dovetail into conversations tomorrow about work planning.

Comment

There was a question earlier in the chat asking what is the process after the model is done?

Comment

With the population model, WDFW staff use that to assess the status of wolves relating to recovery criteria. That is a pure biological basis of the species. I would have to read the WAC. I don't want to get it wrong, but it says something like "no longer in danger of being lost in the state." If the status review says it is warranted, that kicks off more meetings, public comments, it will be initiated under guidelines of the Fish and Wildlife Commission, etc. If not, WDFW will recommend wolves keep their current listing status. So, either they keep listing status based on the model or if we change, that would initiate a SEPA effort and Commission process. That is why I am hesitant with dates because the SEPA process changes timelines again. What might be your top policy today might not be your top policy tomorrow. I am sure that would also be turned around when legislative session starts.

Comment

Thank you for the rapid run-through of your policy world.

Comment

I have one more WAG recruitment update. Reminder: WAG recruitment only occurs when there is a sufficient number of vacancies. A team of Department staff work on that and do a series of interviews. Right now, we only have two vacancies on WAG. It has a maximum of 18, but we don't always have to be at 18 to be functional. There are 16 members, and as of December 31 of 2021, eight of you have appointments that are expiring. Whenever a WAG reappointment happens, that same group of Department staff talk through what is the WAG member's continued interest, do they want to stay involved, etc. Department staff talk through recommendations to provide to the Director. We make recommendations but the Director makes the ultimate decision for appointments. You will receive a letter from the Director about your status on WAG if you are one of those eight people.

Comment

Can you talk about how long it takes? Let's say half of the eight of us whose current term expires in December don't come back and there are six openings on WAG. At that point, would you open up the process? And that takes how long?

Comment

If we had that many, we would have to open it up. Maybe two or three months completely. We have probably a month open to receive applications, then we call every person who applied and conduct phone interviews, discuss needs on WAG, go through each applicant and decide who would fill the gaps, then do in-person interviews that are typically all day long. Sometimes we will appoint one or two new people and let them settle before appointing others.

Comment

I have heard it could be up to a year from when someone applies.

Comment

From the time someone applies, yes. We are trying to fill this group with diversity among and between groups.

Comment

There are two vacancies right now. Do you know what stakeholder groups those two represent?

Comment

The only one I could say is I think we are missing a hunter in this group, a hunting voice. Other than that, the way the sausage is made is we plot everyone on a map and see where they are and if they are in a wolf occupied area. WAG can sometimes get tipped one way or another based on who stays and goes, so we are not always filling exactly what left.

Comment

Do you recall who took the position the Commissioner left?

Comment

I don't know specifically, but I think we had more livestock producers than other identity groups at the time.

Comment

I want to follow that up by saying if there is a producer vacancy, it would be a good time to get someone from the northeast. Someone has stepped away from representing producers, so I believe that leaves four of us.

Comment

Noted, for sure. If it is alright, I would like to move into the public comment. Thank you,

Department staff with updates and WAG members who sat through them. I appreciate you all staying engaged and having important, candid conversations.

Public Comment

- Adrienne Dorf from Washington Sierra Club:
 - Another update that came focused on recent depredations in Columbia County, we had talked about a wolf poaching that was not sent out as a separate update, it was buried in a wolf report. Each time there is a depredation there is an alert. But if a wolf is killed, it doesn't come up that way. It feels biased to me. Now apparently there was a wolf killed from a car hitting it, but nothing came out as an alert. Somehow, I feel it is not balanced.
 - I am surprised how much collaring has been done in the last few months because we have talked about how stressful it is for wolves and dangerous for WDFW staff and yet we are still doing that. I know information was presented about other tools like voice recordings to limit how much collaring you are doing. It just feels like we are doing a lot of collaring for the amount of stress and danger it puts on both staff and wildlife.

- Dave Hendrick of Ferry County:
 - I work with county producers. There is a need for a Ferry County representative on WAG to help build that trust. There has never been one. I can tell you the longer this goes on, the less effect WAG will have on participation with WDFW or any buy-in on WAG policy. Once again, trust is still a huge issue and perception is definitely out there that retribution is alive and well. Not just around Forest Service allotments. Another thing driving people away from WAG is, I think, they are worried that if they are on WAG that it will come back and bite them or their neighbor or something like that.
 - I work for the conservation district and am one of four people that make decisions on nonlethal Department of Agriculture money, so I hear from those NGOs out there doing it. To make it more positive, it has been much better this year. What I have been hearing from them is still tremendous frustration with DFW, but the amount of communication is much better. I would give a lot of credit to the two NGOs because one in particular, the NEWCC representative, really took it on himself to make communication better this year. I have seen huge improvement and will comment the rest tomorrow.

- Ilene Le Vee:
 - I am so impressed with how you have handled today's meeting, facilitators. Big plus for organization and trying to represent multiple perspectives. Hats off as always to all the staff. It is a tough predicament. I won't share more perspective but the whole group gave me more to think about. I am a rancher and landowner in Klickitat County. This just certainly gave me lots of

food for thought and I will tune in tomorrow.

- David Linn with Washington Wildlife First:
 - I heard most of it and it is good conversation, but a few things to raise points: With regard to Togo, it would be good to get more timely depredation reports from the Department. I know some of it needs to be blacked out, but once the recommendation goes to the Director, it seems to take long to get a copy of that.
 - One depredation in Togo was a calf that had to be euthanized. Based on information in the report, the depredation occurred the day after the RAG box was removed. Since this was an SFA, it seems there should have been more deterrence in place in not removing them. It seems like a lack of attention there.
 - I also noted that several calves involved in depredations were born out in the field as opposed to offsite. That is something from the wolf protocol that shouldn't be happening. I also noted that on one pasture there was a rendezvous site and a den nearby and I don't know if enough attention was taken to that.
 - Finally, with regard to Columbia County, the Department report notes that the estimated age of injuries was 3-to-7-weeks-old, which seems like a long time.

- Steph Taylor with Northwest Animal Rights Network:
 - Our organization has been following the process for years. In the past, we expressed frustration about the process feeling stuck but that was partly facilitation. We want to thank the Department for taking action and welcome the facilitation team. Thank you for encouraging those to speak up. I want to encourage people to speak up from animal conservation programs. I also want to second the previous comment; why are we just hearing about the death of the wolf in Columbia County? I want to ask the Department to better inform the public. Thank you and I will further comment tomorrow.

End of Public Comment and Meeting Adjourned