

## **Update on Washington wolves**

Latest reports on key wolf activities, conservation efforts, and management actions.

**June 16, 2017**

### **Wolf captured in Skagit County; confirmed wolf depredation by Sherman Wolf Pack**

#### Wolf captured and collared in Skagit County

On June 8, state and federal wildlife biologists captured an adult male gray wolf in eastern Skagit County. They took genetic samples from the animal and fitted it with a GPS tracking collar before releasing it onsite.

This is the first gray wolf captured and collared in western Washington in modern times.

The animal was captured by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), with support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), during an investigation of wolf activity in eastern Skagit County. Under federal law, USFWS has primary management responsibility in areas of the state – including western Washington – where wolves are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

On May 17, USFWS received a report from a resident of eastern Skagit County that one or more wolves had preyed on his chickens early that morning. He sent photos of two suspected wolves to a federal wolf biologist, noting that he had heard howling and observed tracks in the area during the winter.

At USFWS's request, WDFW dispatched an area wildlife conflict specialist to investigate the situation later that day. The conflict specialist talked to the landowner, examined the scene of the incident, and concluded it was a probable depredation by one or more wolves.

On May 18, wolf biologists from USFWS and WDFW arrived at the property to deploy traps and trail cameras. While there, they saw what appeared to be a wolf in the distance. Three weeks later, they captured an adult male wolf in a trap.

Samples were taken from the animal and sent to the USFWS Forensic Laboratory in Ashland, Ore. Wildlife managers are monitoring GPS signals from the collared animal to track its movements.

That animal is the strongest indication of wolves moving into the western region since 2015, when a female wolf was found dead – struck by a vehicle – on Interstate 90 near Snoqualmie Pass.

The discovery of wolves west of the Cascade Range is significant for state and federal management of the species. The state's wolf recovery plan establishes a goal of maintaining 15 successful breeding pairs for at least three years before the species can be removed from the state's endangered species list. At least four breeding pairs must be in eastern Washington, four in the Northern Cascades, four in the Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast, and three anywhere in the state.

Last year there were eight breeding pairs in the eastern region and two in the Northern Cascades and none in the Southern Cascades. Additional breeding pairs west of the Cascade Range will help bring the state closer to its recovery goal.

#### Confirmed wolf depredation by Sherman Wolf Pack

WDFW officials have confirmed that one or more wolves were responsible for the death of a calf whose carcass was discovered on June 12 in a grazing allotment of Ferry County. Investigators also found scattered skeletal remains of a second calf, but they could not determine the cause of its death.

The report was made by a WDFW contract range rider who found a recently deceased calf and partial remains of a second calf while patrolling an area that had a cluster of GPS points from a collared wolf from the Sherman Pack. After finding and reporting the carcass and remains to WDFW, the range rider remained on the scene to prevent scavenging by wildlife.

Shortly after sunrise on Tuesday, June 13, two WDFW officials arrived on the scene. The Department officials who conducted the investigation indicated that the first event was an intact calf carcass with injuries to the groin, inside areas of both the hindquarters and hamstrings. The injuries consisted of bite lacerations and puncture wounds with hemorrhaging associated with those bite wounds. The injuries to calf were consistent with a wolf depredation. The GPS points from the Sherman Pack collared wolf showed that the wolf had been at the location several times between June 3-11. Data from another collared wolf from the Profanity Peak Pack showed the animal was in the area sporadically from June 5-7. Based on all available factors, the event was classified as a confirmed wolf depredation by one or more members of the Sherman Pack. The depredation occurred on BLM grazing lands. It is the first confirmed depredation involving the Sherman Pack.

The second calf's remains were discovered 150 yards downhill from the first calf carcass. Because the scene consisted of only skeletal remains, scattered over a 40-yard area, WDFW classified the event as an Unknown Cause of Death.

The livestock producer grazes both private and public lands in the area. The producer's calves were born outside of occupied wolf range and were trucked into the area for the summer grazing season. The producer turned the cattle out onto private land on May 24.

The producer uses five WDFW contract range riders to increase the level of human presence around the cattle throughout their grazing allotments. The range riders started patrolling the area on May 9, before the cattle were turned out to check for carnivore activity and to proactively increase regular human presence. They have continued to patrol the area with cattle on a near-daily basis, and communicate frequently with the producer. Any changes in cattle behavior or carnivore activity has been shared with WDFW. The range riders also monitor the activity of GPS collared wolves in the area. There are no known wolf dens or rendezvous sites in the area.

Following the depredation investigation, the calf carcass from the confirmed wolf depredation was removed from where high cattle activity is expected. The range riders will continue to patrol the area and surrounding areas.