

Statement on Wedge Pack wolf management actions September 21, 2012

Conservation Northwest
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The most important goals of the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan are to promote the recovery of a self-sustaining wolf population and to minimize wolf-livestock conflict. The Wedge Pack of wolves in Northeast Washington, which has engaged in an escalating pattern of attacks on livestock since July, is putting that plan – and those goals -- to the test.

There have been 15 documented attacks on cattle this summer, and it is likely that many more attacks have occurred, given the extent and remoteness of the grazing lands in the region. The pack's pattern of attacks has been continuous, and has escalated in recent weeks. There is a very high likelihood that this pack has switched from the normal pattern of preying on deer, elk, and moose to focus on cattle.

Wolf managers have long recognized that the only way healthy populations of wolves will be sustained is if the problems they cause locally are addressed quickly and effectively. In situations like the one involving the Wedge Pack, experts from across the West agree: Eliminating the pack will help to reset the stage for wolves that are not habituated to livestock to establish themselves in that area.

While this scenario and measures to address it were anticipated in the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, putting those measures into practice has proven trying for everyone involved. Wolf management is relatively new in Washington, and we have all worked hard to avoid the current situation with the Wedge Pack.

Northeast Washington supports habitat for several predator species, including wolves, bears, and cougars, because prey is abundant. This is also a region where ranchers and their families have made a living for generations and built communities based on raising cattle. It is clear that coexistence between cattle and wolves will require adapting the management of both wolves and livestock.

The state's wolf plan is less than 1 year old. On one hand, we can celebrate the fact that wolves are quickly re-colonizing the state. On the other, we know that promoting wolf recovery while ensuring ranchers do not bear an undue burden will be critical to the long-term recovery of a sustainable wolf population.

Our organizations recognize the need for patience and cooperation if wolf recovery in Washington is to succeed. Washington's wolf story should be about the recovery of wolves rather than a chronology of conflict.

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