

Wolf Advisory Group Conference Call
April 27, 2016

Meeting Notes

WAG Members: Jack Field, Dave Duncan, Dan McKinley, Paula Swedeen, Diane Gallegos, Lisa Stone, Shawn Cantrell, Tom Davis, Tim Coleman, Bob Aegeter, Dan Paul, Mark Pidgeon (additional participants may have joined after roll call)

WDFW Staff Members: Donny Martorello, Anis Aoude, Candace Bennett, Trent Roussin, Jay Shepherd, Matthew Peterson, Scott Becker, Stephanie Simek, Matthew Trenda

Third Party Neutral: Francine Madden

Introductions and Welcome: The third party neutral welcomed everyone to the call and took roll. She outlined the goals for the call.

The purpose of the call is to review the flipchart notes and discussion from a few weeks ago by Department staff members. The goal is to ensure an understanding and make sure WAG members have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments on the ideas that came out of the discussion.

WAG Meeting Review: Donny gave an overview of the last WAG meeting and how Department staff members had been asked to meet and discuss the path to lethal control and come back to WAG with proposals for discussion, questions, and comments.

All 83 variables were considered over the ensuing meetings. Anywhere from 12-15 staff members met multiple times in late March. Multiple options were carried out of the meetings.

Donny reviewed the groups from the previous WAG meeting:

Group 1 took the idea of being proactive rather than reactive. Producers taking nonlethal action would have depredations count as 1.5, rather than 1, towards the final count of 4 when considering lethal action. It is an incentive and a mechanism to get nonlethal measures on the ground.

There were several factors that could be discussed, including the species depredated upon, what is really meant by the 1.5 count, and the increase in hobby farms around the state. Hobby farms could be closer to human presence anyway as a result of what they are.

Getting away from the micromanagement process, but also keeping communication open during the process was also discussed. Also, a meeting about lessons learned after a lethal action would be in place.

What are the expectations that count toward a 1.5 number in several different situations? This includes cost share situations on the ground.

Group 2 talked about keeping it a simple process, starting with an objective investigation and building good relationships. Political pressure was also discussed. This political pressure could provide opportunities for training those folks on the process and how it needs to be objective.

Trust within the Department was a huge topic for Group 2. The discussion included the topic of using lethal control as a last resort. Situations could call for lethal control a little earlier, but the reasons would be clearly communicated.

The agency might consider lethal control at some maximum number. At some point the agency must say enough is enough with depredations and must move forward with lethal control.

The relationship between the conflict specialists and the producers was also discussed, as well as giving those staff members on the ground more authority in the preventative process. The role of HQ would be a decision to move forward with lethal control or not.

The first internal meeting for reviewing Group 2's discussion included the idea of qualitative control and how too much is undefined at this point. There was support for greater authority moving to staff members on the ground.

Group 3 talked a lot about managing expectations with communication, including doing a lot up front about a lethal control plan. There would be a lot of planning before the lethal control took place. For the safety of staff members, weekly updates would occur. At the end of the control effort, a review and lessons learned would take place.

A discussion came up about the agency performing lethal control on a holiday. Factors could include road closures and other issues that could affect staff safety. Assessments would be made before the holiday weekend to determine all factors beforehand. The issue of holidays and weekends is not just staff safety, however. It is also public safety. Those factors would also be considered.

There was also some discussion about vetting that process through all relevant WDFW staff members.

Candace gave an overview of Option 1A. Staff members generally liked Option 1A, with some modifications and leeway for adjustments in the future. Definitions are included, featuring what a depredation is, what an event looks like, etc. Producers and the public would know ahead of time what those terms were. The difference between large and small animals was also discussed. Large versus small would apply towards what is considered a depredation event. Option 1A takes science and the law of averages into account.

Large animal depredations are typically one animal, while smaller animal depredations typically feature more than one animal. Splitting by animal units was also discussed.

Producers using quality nonlethals versus those who do not was thoroughly discussed.

Variables in pack history were discussed as well. Should all packs start the same every year? The science of pack size came up. Small packs may require a larger number of depredations than large packs. Producer and staff safety is extremely important, and that was a major factor for discussion. Death threats and other actions have occurred in the past, and avoiding those as best as possible is important.

Candace talked about the pack control initiation section. Pack size would play a role in Option 1A. If four or more adults were in a pack, that pack would reach lethal control at fewer depredations than a pack with three or fewer adults. Chronically depredating packs would also be considered, with recurring packs taking less time to get to lethal control than first time offenders.

Pack location was also discussed. Donny gave an example of why that might be important. Where a pack falls on the Washington map may have to play a part.

Tom asked about the number of kills, pointing out that amount of animals killed could be dozens before lethal control occurs.

Candace answered that right now, one event could count even if a dozen sheep are killed in one day. That was discussed a lot in the breakout.

Donny said that it's true that multiple carcasses could count for one event, but that can happen in each of the options.

Tom said he only wanted to point out that area for further discussion.

Donny said that it can be very difficult for specialists on the ground to determine when multiple carcasses are part of the same event. This is called out because while there are no sure answers as of now, the Department focused a lot of discussion on that area.

Donny said that Option 1A deals with two important variables, including having an incentive for proactive nonlethals, and the ability to deal with when some producers in an area are using quality nonlethals and some are not.

On page 11 of the meeting materials, the overview can be found. It was pointed out that it wasn't as much an incentive as it was a part of the process. Producers who do not use

nonlethals will have to use them before lethal control is used, so the process is sped up for producers who are already using quality nonlethals. That step does not need to be taken.

The inequality issues came up and were called out. With the 1.5 versus 1 count situation, some inequality on the ground could be felt. There was no solution as of yet, but the topic is certainly on the radar.

Scott gave an overview of Option 5. Incentives for the producers using nonlethal measures would see a higher rate of compensation after depredations than a producer who was not using nonlethal measures. What that rate might be was not discussed thoroughly.

Funding the program was discussed as well. As more and more wolves are on the landscape, DPCA-Ls are less and less effective, so some of the funding there could go to this new program. This would put more pressure on the conflict specialists on the ground.

One issue that came up was about a producer who does not use nonlethals at first, but after one depredation starts implementing them.

Changes to state laws would have to be made if this becomes an option everyone wants to pursue. There was an agreement that there are nonlethal techniques that have to be on the landscape.

Anis added that one rationale for doing away with the DPCA-Ls was because they wanted to avoid paying twice for the same actions. Fairness would come into that equation.

Jack asked why the Department deviated from the process of putting the compensation method in place that had the producer show what the value of animal was and being paid twice that amount in the event of a confirmed depredation.

Donny said that in the current process for a confirmed depredation, there is a range of what WDFW pays. One times the market value of the animal or two times the market value of the animal depending on the size of the acreage and confirmed depredation. There is then a claim on the value on the animal.

Jack pointed out that producers should not have to eat 90% in the event of market fluctuations. The reason for placing the value of the animal on the contemporary group was to take the Department out of the role in being the expert on valuation. Jack said the Department is not recognizing the value of the animal when a producer sells ahead of the curve and gets ahead of the market. Jack said there will need to be significant modifications in his opinion.

Donny said the intent is to pay greater than the value of the animal, and thanked Jack for bringing up the issue. It will be further discussed immediately. Stephanie agreed that a follow up will occur.

Donny mentioned that Option 5 had the situation where a producer and a neighbor may be doing proactive nonlethals, but one may reach the lethal control threshold and the other does not. This could create a situation of inequality. Wanting to have a positive outcome on the ground and address that inequality is something that was also discussed.

Anis gave an overview of Option 6, which takes Option 5 a step further. It features a fund of some kind that producers and WDFW can pay into that would compensate. An insurance program was also discussed. If depredations occur, that money could be used to pay for those depredations or be put towards increased nonlethal measures. Similar methods are being used in the southwestern United States.

It was an effort to think outside the box on incentivizing nonlethals.

Jay gave a brief overview of Option 7. This has different levels of lethal threshold for different permittees on federal grazing properties. This would be a threshold of 3 for a producer conducting quality, proactive nonlethals and a threshold of 5 for a producer not doing that. One pitfall is that it can put neighbors against neighbors. A single wolf pack could find itself at different levels for lethal removal at different properties. That problem led to Option 1A, where individual depredations count at different levels so you don't have to count at the property level. Jay said this was the discussion that led to Option 1A.

Donny touched on Option 8, which covers the flowchart. There were questions about whether the flowchart or the process that led to it was broken. There was a general feeling that the flowchart was created through a poor process, and there wasn't a lot of draw back to the flowchart.

Donny reiterated that this was a brainstorming session and no final ideas were decided upon. However, there was some cohesion on several ideas, including Option 1A. There was also a sense of liking elements of all the different options. There was also an idea that this would not be put into play immediately, and further work with WAG would need to be conducted.

Jay said he wanted to point out there was not complete cohesion on that aspect.

Scott went over the Period of Time slide from the materials, which talked about the time clock for depredations and for every pack. The likelihood of conflicts is much higher during the summer grazing season, at least right now in Washington. The calendar year would make it simple and apply to every single pack.

There was some concern about depredations that occurred in late December and carried into January of the next year. Scott said the potential for lethal control on that particular pack would still be there if they are chronically depredating.

Donny said there was a lot of discussion about how to count different time periods. The calendar year encompasses the summer period and is fairly close to covering denning period to denning period. As a group, an interest in the pattern emerged. If a pack started in late December and continued into January, it was asked if that should be an exception. Donny said something like that would put doubts into the minds of stakeholders.

Paula mentioned that the calendar year does not take into account what might constitute as a break in chronic behavior. If one pack depredates in January, but then doesn't again until December of that same year, does that count as chronic? There is no room to define the patterns with a calendar year setup.

Anis brought up that not everything is going to fall into straight categories. There will also need to be a way to take things into consideration.

Donny gave an overview of the expectations for producers to meet the 1.5 count model. It was brought up that the conflict specialists on the ground would be in charge of determining that. The group talked about that and isolated a single case in an attempt to think more about it. It was straight brainstorming. The expectations may mean different things for different producers.

What does checking on livestock mean? Factors include time spent, distance, etc. It was felt that this discussion would be better to have with WAG.

Jay talked about the many variables involved with each producer when checking quality nonlethals. He said in many cases, it'll come down to retroactive judgement.

Jay next discussed lethal action detail and communication. Having a lead person in the field at the very first depredation would result in better, clearer communication. That lead person, the incident commander, would communicate with the team on a daily basis, so everyone was informed and had the same information.

Telling WAG what is happening prior to lethal action would be essential as well. The concern for safety also was discussed.

Donny said the incident commander might also need to coordinate with USFWS. The pathway to lethal control may also mean the pathway to relocation or another action.

Donny said that sometimes the lethal action will be unsuccessful, and if depredations stop after that failure, further lethal action would not be pursued. If the pattern breaks, you don't reinstate unless something happens.

Donny gave an overview of the next slides, discussing how once lethal control is initiated, nonlethal measures, except for the most basic (sanitation), stop in the interest of safety.

The last slide talks about other ideas and concepts that could be discussed with WAG. This includes communicating with other states, gathering the literature on all parts of lethal control and making it available on the website, and other kinds of conditions that may call for lethal control.

The floor was opened for questions.

Tom asked where we go from here. What is the plan?

Donny said part of that has already been started by getting the information out to multiple folks besides WAG members, including county commissioners and other representatives. He wanted to emphasize that these meetings were brainstorming sessions, and WAG would discuss shaping that into something as a group.

Tom said what he would like to see happen is to have a focus and direction for the producers as they turnout their livestock this year. He is concerned that there may not be as tight a focus on a target to accomplish a direction before turnout.

Anis said that from the perspective of WDFW staff members, they wanted to bring options for WAG to discuss, even though they had a few topics that rose to the top during the meetings.

Jack asked how WDFW will determine what the path forward is at this point.

Anis said WDFW is hoping for the group to zone in on this issue. Donny said they now wanted to hear how WAG feels about these things, and that discussion would lead to cohesion and consensus.

Jack asked how we will know when consensus is reached.

Donny said it will be the WAG process. WAG will make a recommendation to WDFW and WDFW will be a part of that. That dialogue will point the direction forward.

Paula asked if there was some value in having prep discussions to ensure we are in the best spot possible to move forward during the next meeting.

Tom liked the idea of focusing on one or two of the Department's options in an effort to focus their discussion during the May meetings.

Jay said that because of so many issues in play, there should be options there. When thinking about implementing these actions, more things come up that may not have been planned.

Donny said narrowing down the options should be a process that is handled with WAG involved. There are some key discussions that need to happen.

Donny said there are several items that can be fleshed out that will apply to any plan implemented, and it may be that those can be discussed more now while WAG focuses on other categories that are less science-based and more about implementation.

Jay agreed and mentioned that what is less complete is the method for implementation, as well as pros and cons and the issues involved with each option.

The third party neutral said that it could be that WDFW uses the scientific expertise to bring concrete options forward, while the social change aspect could be discussed further during the WAG meeting with WAG and WDFW staff members.

Donny said that during the meetings, WDFW staff member were hesitant to move forward anymore without input from WAG. Having something resilient that everyone can support is important to WDFW. He said much of the information needs that inclusive process.

Paula asked what lethal action detail means.

Donny said once the green light for control is there, what does the protocol look like? Period of time, methods, etc.

Trent said that in Option 1A, WDFW has done its best to use that available science.

Paula said that there is a sense of discomfort in how "getting to lethal" sounds. She said that will be something WAG wants to discuss.

Donny said WAG members are always free to call him or any Department staff members for any clarification purposes. Department staff members are always ready to help.

The third party neutral thanked everyone for joining in the call and thanked WDFW for all the hard work and for walking everyone through the process.

Meeting Adjourned