Washington Gray Wolf Conservation and Management 2011 Annual Report

A cooperative effort by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service

Photo:WDFW, Paul Frame

This report presents information on the status, distribution, and management of wolves in the State of Washington, from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011.

This report may be copied and distributed as needed.

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Summary

Wolves (*Canis* lupus) were first documented recolonizing Washington State in 2008 when the breeding pair of what came to be known as the Lookout Pack were captured and radio collared in the Methow Valley of the North Cascades. The next two packs were confirmed in 2009 (Diamond) and 2010 (Salmo) in northeastern Washington.

Two new Washington packs were documented in 2011. These packs occur in northeastern Washington (Smackout) and the southern portion of the North Cascades (Teanaway), which brings the number of confirmed packs in Washington to five. There were a minimum of 27 wolves and three breeding pairs comprising these five packs in 2011. This is an increase of eight wolves and two breeding pairs from 2010. Packs ranged in size from 2 (Lookout) to 10 (Diamond) with the average 5.4 wolves per pack. All three packs that were known to have reproduced were counted as breeding pairs with a total of 10 pups surviving to December 31st.

There were no confirmed livestock losses in Washington during 2011. One sheep carcass which was fed on by wolves was investigated but determined to have been killed by a cougar. A sheep herding dog was injured in an altercation with wolves, but has since recovered after receiving veterinary care. The WDFW compensated the owner for the veterinary costs.

On December 3, 2010, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Plan) for Washington. The Plan calls for 15 successful breeding pairs of wolves distributed in three recovery areas for three consecutive years, or 18 successful breeding pairs distributed in three recovery areas for a single year to initiate the process of delisting wolves from the State Endangered Species list. The Plan can be downloaded from http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00001/ .

Personnel

In 2011, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) monitored wolves in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the U.S. Forest Service (FS), and the National Park Service (NPS). Wolf monitoring personnel included Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinator Harriet Allen; law enforcement officers Dan Anderson, Jim Brown, Mike Charron, Dan Christensen, Jason Day, Severin Erickson, Troy McCormick, Corey Peterson, Brent Scherzinger, Mike Sprecher, Pam Taylor, Cal Treser, and Don Weatherman; biologists Jennifer Bohannon, Paul DeBruyn, Scott Fitkin, Paul Frame, Jeff Heinlen, William Moore, Anthony Novack, Jay Shepherd, Lindsay Welfelt, Paul Wik, and Mark Vekasy; FS biologists, Bill Gains, Andrea Lyons, Ray Robertson, John Rore, and Aja Woodrow; NPS biologist Roger Christophersen; FWS agent Corky Roberts; FWS biologists Hilary Cooley and Gregg Kurz. Dave Parker and Carla Dedera of Northern Air, Bonners Ferry, Idaho and John May of Flight Tech, Prosser, Washington piloted monitoring flights.

Background

Wolves were functionally extinct from Washington State by the 1930s. Unconfirmed wolf observations began to be reported in the 1970s and increased in the 1980s and early 1990s. During summer of 2008, the first confirmed wolf observations and reproduction were documented when a breeding pair was captured and radio-collared in north central Washington. In summer of 2009 the second pack was confirmed in Pend Oreille County in northeastern Washington. In summer of 2010 a third pack was confirmed, also in Pend Oreille County. There has been wolf activity documented in the Blue Mountains of southeastern Washington but no packs were yet confirmed there on 31 December 2011. Recolonization of Washington is taking place from three different geographic regions (Figure 1); greater British Columbia, northwest Montana/northern Idaho, and central Idaho/northeastern Oregon.

Wolves are classified as Endangered under Washington state law (RCW 77.15.120, WAC 232-12-014, Appendix A) throughout the entire state. Additional Federal protections are in place for the western two thirds of the state, where wolves are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Wolves in the eastern third of the state are included in the Northern Rocky Mountains Distinct Population Segment (NRM DPS, Figure 2) and were removed from federal protection in May 2011 along with Idaho, Montana, eastern Oregon, and northern Utah.

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a Wolf Conservation and Management Plan for Washington as of December 3, 2011. The plan calls for 15 successful breeding pairs of wolves distributed in three recovery areas for three years or 18 successful breeding pairs of wolves distributed in three recovery areas for one year to initiate the State de-listing process. The plan can be downloaded from, http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00001/.

Figure 1. Generalized pattern of wolf recolonization in Washington State.

Monitoring

Population status of Wolves in Washington inside the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS

On 31 December 2011 the minimum wolf population in the portion of Washington within the NRM DPS was 18 animals in three confirmed packs, with two of those counted as breeding pairs (Figure 2, Table 1). The three packs consisted of three, five, and 10 wolves (average six). Individual wolf observations were reported in other parts of eastern Washington; however we did not document any additional breeding activity.

Population Status of Wolves in Washington outside of the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS

At the end of December 2011, there were a minimum of 9 wolves in 2 confirmed packs outside of the NRM DPS (Figure 3, Table 2). The sizes of these packs were two and seven wolves.

2011 Washington Wolf Packs inside the Northern Rockies DPS

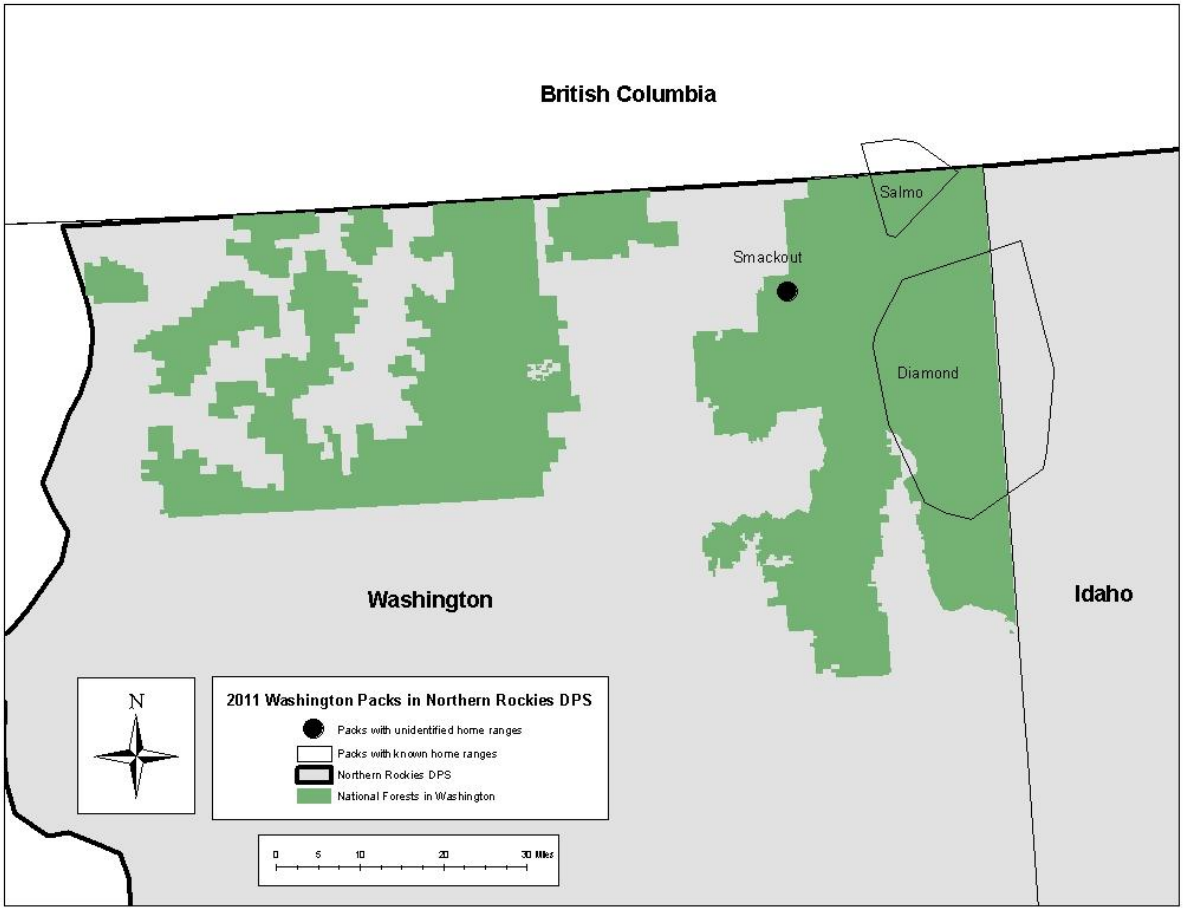

Figure 2. Confirmed wolf packs in Washington within the Northern Rockies DPS, 2011.

Table 1. Composition of confirmed Washington wolf packs within the Northern Rockies DPS for 2011. Underlined packs count as breeding pairs.

	MINIMUM PACK SIZE DEC 2011			DOCUMENTED		Confirmed Livestock
PACK	ADULT	PUP	TOTAL	MORTALITIES	MISSING[2]	Losses[3]
Diamond #	7	3	10	1[1]	1	0
Salmo	3	0	3			0
Smackout	2	3	5			0
Totals	12	6	18	1	1	0

1 Legally harvested in Idaho
2 Collared wolves that became missing in 2011
3 Includes only domestic animals confirmed by WDFW as killed by wolves.
Border pack shared with the State of Idaho; dens in Washington.

2011 Washington Wolf Packs outside the Northern Rockies DPS

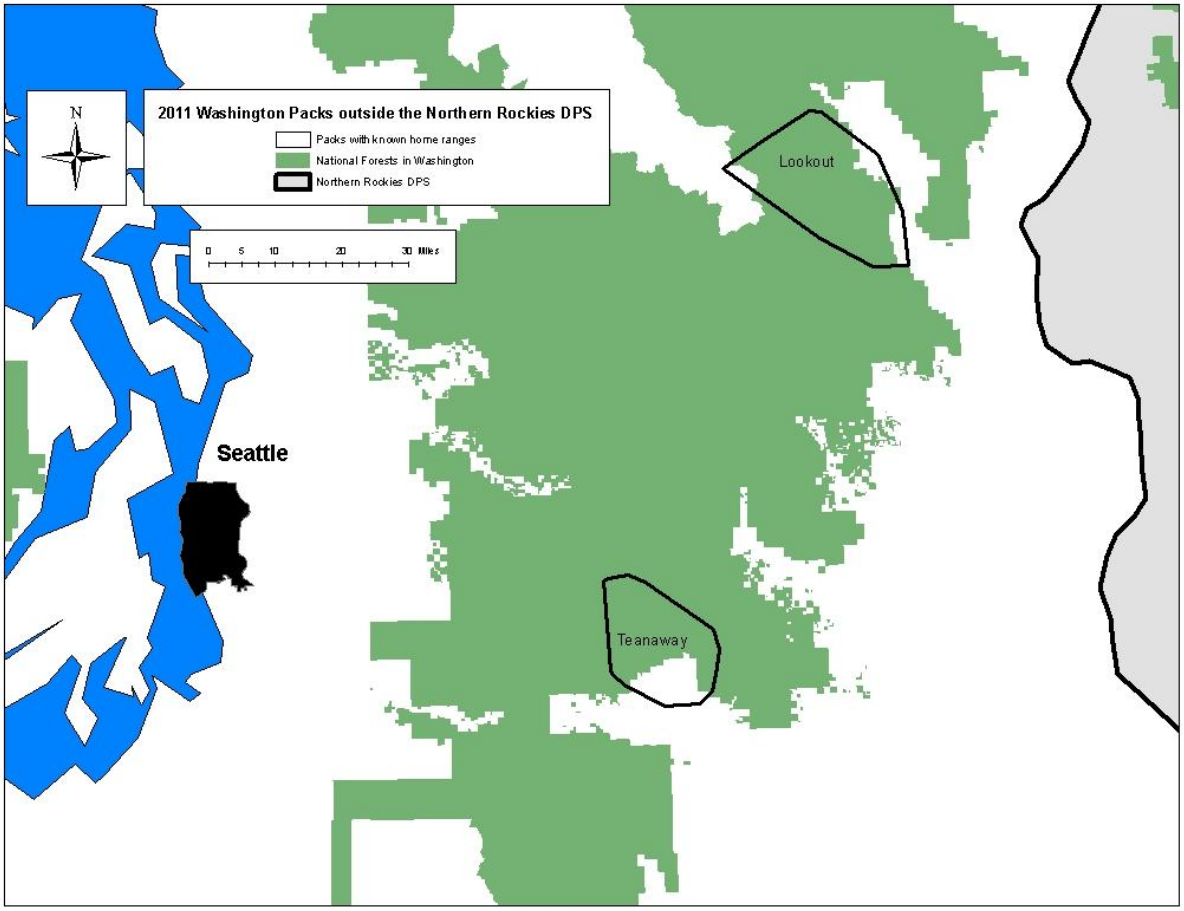

Figure 3. Confirmed wolf packs in Washington outside the Northern Rockies DPS, 2011.

Table 2. Composition of confirmed Washington wolf packs outside the Northern Rockies DPS for 2011. Underlined packs count as breeding pairs.

	MINIMUM ESTIMATED PACK SIZE DEC 2011			Confirmed Livestock
PACK	ADULT	PUP	TOTAL	Losses[1]
Lookout	2	0	2	0
Teanaway	3	4	7	0
Totals	5	4	9	0

1 Includes only domestic animals confirmed by WDFW as killed by wolves.

Population Size Over Time

The population of confirmed wolves in Washington increased by 8 animals, from 19 in 2010 to 27 in 2011, a change of approximately 30%. The average increase from 2008-2012 has been 31% per year (Figure 4), from five animals in one pack in 2008 to 27 animals in five packs in 2011.

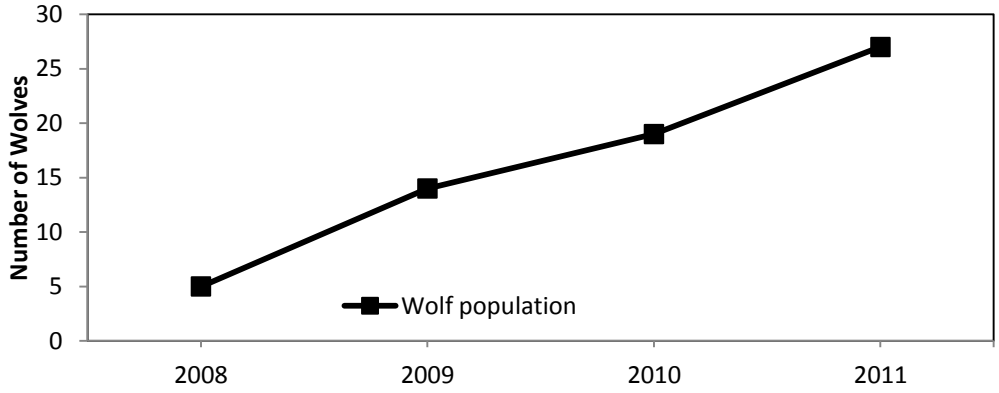

Figure 4. Wolf population growth in Washington State, 2008-2011.

Reproduction

Three of the five packs in Washington were known to have produced at least 10 pups in 2011 and were counted as successful breeding pairs (Table 1, 2). These litter sizes were four, three, and three for an average of 3.3 pups per litter in 2011.

Mortalities

We documented one mortality in 2011. This was a Diamond Pack yearling female that was legally killed during the trapping season in the portion of the pack's territory that occurs in northern Idaho.

Capture and Radio Collaring

A total of seven wolves in three different packs were captured during 2011. Of those seven wolves, five were fit with radio collars and two small pups received ear tags only. We monitored six radio collared wolves in three packs (22% of the population, 60% of packs) during 2011. Home range sizes of packs monitored to date average approximately 300 square miles.

Management

Livestock Conflicts

Four of the five confirmed packs' territories overlap grazing alotments on public land. There were no confirmed livestock losses in Washington in 2011. One incident where wolves were observed feeding on a sheep carcass was investigated and determined to be a cougar kill.

Pet Conflicts

A sheep herding dog was injured in a conflict with wolves at the above mentioned sheep carcass. The herder was able to drive the wolves away before the dog was killed. The dog has successfully recovered from its injuries and WDFW paid the veterinary bills ($423.70).

Research

The wolf population is still quite small in Washington and this is reflected in the amount of research activitiy currently taking place in the state.

Title: Diet analysis of wolves in Washington
Principal Investigator: Paul Frame, WDFW Wolf Specialist
Cooperators: Sam Wasser and Carolyn Shores, Center for Conservatin Biology, Univerisity of Washington
Project Summary: As wolves recolonize Washington State, managers are interested in how they may impact prey populations. A first step in understanding this dynamic is to learn about the proportional prey compositon of wolf diet. We are using two methods to study this, first we are investigating potential kill sites at clusters of locations acquired by GPS radio collars, and we are also opportunistically collecting and analyzing wolf scats during year round field operations.

Washington Contact Information

WDFW Biologists

Harriet Allen, T&E Manager
(360) 902-2694
harriet.allen@dfw.wa.gov

Donny Martorello, Carinvore Manager
(360) 902-2521
donny.martorello@dfw.wa.gov

Paul Frame, Wolf Specialist
(509) 679-1419
paul.frame@dfw.wa.gov

WDFW Law Enforcement

Spokane, Region 1
(509) 892-1001

Ephrata, Region 2
(509) 754-4624

Yakima, Region 3
(509) 575-2740

Olympia, Headquarters
(360) 902-2200