



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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The Honorable Jay Inslee
Washington State Governor
Post Office Box 40009
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

I am writing regarding our earlier communications (enclosed) about wolf-livestock conflict in the Kettle River Range in northeastern Washington. I would like to provide an update on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) strategies for reducing the loss of wolves and livestock in the area.

Since my last communication on December 1, 2019, the Department has met four times with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to consider potential changes to allotment management that would benefit wolves, livestock, and people. These meetings included both local staff from the Colville National Forest as well as regional staff based in Portland. The discussions at these meetings ranged from the importance of range riding and how allotment planning can facilitate range riding duties, to alternate or transitional grazing allotments, to assistance for collecting cattle at the end of the grazing season. Based on these meetings and our dialogue, the USFS continues to be supportive of the Department's recommendations to use range riders on grazing allotments in the Kettle Range. They are also supportive of allotment planning that is beneficial to the producer, cattle, and wolves, but indicated that substantive allotment changes would require National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and are unrealistic for the 2020 grazing season.

USFS staff have also become regular attendees at Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) meetings and their attendance has allowed them to provide updates and insight about grazing on USFS lands. The continued presence of USFS staff at WAG meetings has provided new and welcome voices of collaborative land managers into the room to help both the Department and WAG members understand the current policy and management of federal public grazing allotments.

The Department has continued an expedited meeting schedule with the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG). Since last grazing season, the WAG has convened five times (Nov. 20-21, 2019; Jan. 8-9, 2020; Mar. 31-Apr. 1, 2020; Apr. 30, 2020, and May 18-19, 2020). We very much appreciate JT Austin's visit to WAG on Jan. 8, and her dialogue and guidance with WAG members and Department staff.

The focus of the past five meetings for both the Department and the WAG has been on improvements to the wolf-livestock interaction protocol, which provides guidance for decision making. COVID-19 has undoubtedly hindered the WAG process, which is built on collaboration by fostering relationships and reconciliation. Under normal circumstances, the content is challenging, but working through these difficult issues virtually exacerbates that challenge. That said, Department staff and WAG members have focused their efforts on trying to improve the efficacy of non-lethal tools, and clarity on roles and responsibilities of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff and livestock producers.

At this time, the WAG has not finalized their recommendation to the Director on a revised protocol. One of the areas of the protocol on which they have spent considerable time is improving the expectations for range riding duties and accountability. Following the expert guidance of our staff and the dialogue with the WAG, once livestock are turned out for summer on the Colville National Forest within the Kettle River Range, range riding is the tool best-suited for reducing the likelihood of wolf depredations in allotments with dispersed grazing. For your convenience, I have enclosed the draft range rider duties section generated through the WAG process. Although it is not final and there may be additional edits, it will provide you with an idea about the expectations and intensity of this important non-lethal tool. I would consider the thoughtful, stakeholder-based development of the expectations for this nonlethal tool a major step forward in the Department's renewed focus on proactive, nonlethal tools compared to years prior.

In addition to addressing the expectations for range riding in the WAG process, the following are strategies that are either new to Washington this year (different from years prior) or are improvements to increase the efficacy of non-lethal tools.

1. Increased range riding capacity. Range rider services are now available to producers through three different entities: The Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative (NEWWCC) and the Cattle Producers of Washington (CPOW). Livestock producers can use Department-contracted range riders, and we are currently recruiting to increase the number of range riders from last year. This summer, the Department has \$250,000 dollars allocated to range riding services statewide.

The Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative (NEWWCC) received \$320,000 from the general-fund for use of range riders, specifically in the Kettle River Range. In addition, Cattle Producers of Washington (CPOW) received nearly \$150,000 in general-fund dollars from a Washington Department of Agriculture grant. CPOW has indicated they are using a portion of that funding for range riders for a producer in the Kettle River Range.

It is worth noting that having a diversity of range riding services available, including those locally owned and operated, is an important component of our long-term solution. Range riding is not "one size fits all." Livestock producers have different needs and varying levels of trust in the entities involved. To be successfully implemented, producers need to have trust in the people working with their cattle, which are their

personal property and livelihood. Supporting local range riding entities is critical. Additionally, the Department is likely not the appropriate entity for providing livestock husbandry services in the long term.

I believe this increased capacity and variety of range riding options is critically important in the Kettle River Range area. It will allow for more complete and consistent coverage by rotating range riders and reducing the time gaps when range riders are not present on the landscape. It will also allow livestock producers and WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialists to increase the intensity of range riding during periods of time when the risk of conflict is especially high.

2. Increased accountability of range rider activities. Range riding typically occurs in an allotment type setting that is remote, rugged, and often heavily timbered. As such, it creates challenges for understanding the geographic area covered, the intensity, and the potential for addressing gaps and emergent needs. All Department range riders are carrying a handheld GPS and/or satellite communication device (i.e., Garmin inReach), allowing them to document their findings and location, and communicate in real time with producers and local WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialists. It is our understanding that NEWWCC and CPOW range riders are also documenting findings and locations with similar geo-referencing devices (e.g., handheld GPS, georeferenced photos, or Garmin inReach). In addition, all three range riding entities are documenting their range riding activities in a daily log. We are working with NEWWCC and CPOW on the content needs of those logs for consistency and decision making.
3. New or expanded non-lethal deterrent pilot projects. Northeastern Washington community members and WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialists have worked together on ideas for additional non-lethal deterrents. The focus was identifying new tools not yet widely deployed or used and implement them in areas with chronic depredations in northeast Washington. The ad hoc group came up with several ideas focused on aiding range riders in their duties, assisting livestock producers with their cattle, and/or aiding WDFW's efficiency with assisting both entities (see enclosure). Each of the pilot projects are in different stages of development. The Department provided funding for some of these pilot projects during the 2020 grazing season.

The Department has discussed implementation of proactive non-lethal deterrents with each livestock producer who has cattle on a USFS allotment within a wolf pack territory with a history of chronic depredation. The use of proactive non-lethal deterrents is tailored to the producer's specific operation and takes into consideration factors such as the type and number of livestock, characteristics of the grazing area, and the history of wolf-livestock conflict. In addition to documenting the proactive deterrent measures in place, Department staff also maintain records detailing communications with the producer, any additions or modifications to non-lethal tools, and depredation events.

As much as I would like to assure you that these tools will prevent wolf depredations on livestock, unfortunately I cannot. In areas where wolves and livestock overlap, there will always be a potential for conflict, and each conflict will come with its own unique set of facts and

challenges. However, I believe strongly that as a collective (livestock producers, local communities, the WAG, county governments, the Forest Service, the Department, etc.) we have the best-suited strategies and tools in place to reduce the likelihood of wolf depredation on livestock. If a pattern of wolf depredation does occur, and each member in the “collective we” has done their individual part to use non-lethal tools as our first line of defense, then lethal removal warrants my consideration as another tool to address repeated wolf depredations on livestock.

I am also not in a position to force or regulate livestock husbandry practices, especially because many involve direct interaction with the livestock producer’s personal property—their livestock. They also involve federal land management and laws over which the state does not have authority. I do not believe forcing compliance leads to success. Our landscape is now shared by wolves and livestock, and our wolf plan supports coexistence, with a sustainable wolf population and strong economic vitality of the local livestock community. It will take our diverse communities working together in a collaborative process, rather than force, to achieve that future.

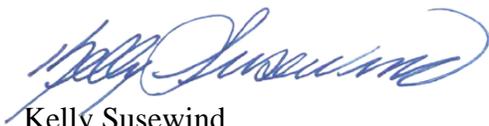
There have been and will likely continue to be situations where not all the expectations for non-lethal deterrents are met. Our current protocol provides guidance on that situation and states, “If proactive deterrence measures are not in place a sufficient amount of time prior to the wolf depredations, the Department will only consider lethal removal at a higher number of wolf depredation events and after deterrence measures have been tried and failed at resolving the conflict” (page 14, available online [here](#)).

As you know, wolf conservation and management in our state is one of the Department’s highest priorities, and I thank you for your concern and attention to this issue. Your request was to increase our reliance on non-lethal tools and significantly reduce the need for lethal removal of wolves. The strategies outlined above seek to do that and are in balance with the realities of the types of influence we can have on wild landscapes and private business owners.

The Department will continue regular communications with JT Austin to ensure you have situational awareness as we move further into the grazing season. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your interest and engagement on this important wildlife conservation and management issue.

Sincerely,



Kelly Susewind
Director

Enclosures

Pilot Projects (Creative Solutions) for Chronic Conflict Zones

The main goals of the below list are to 1) positively engage the community and staff working on human-wildlife conflict to build long-lasting durable relationships, 2) to explore creative long-term and viable solutions surrounding wolves in northeast Washington, and 3) promote work that utilizes the experience of staff, encourages collaboration across programs, and with external partners.

The development of each deterrent was a collaborative process with both internal and external staff and partners. The focus of these deterrents is meant to be piloted in areas of chronic depredations of northeast Washington and in collaboration with external partners to create solutions not yet widely deployed. These projects are initially being tested by WDFW to compare different deterrents and their effectiveness. Expansion of these deterrents will be explored shortly, applied as needed, or eventually provided as options for external stakeholder groups/NGOs/producers to implement once deemed viable and feasible. For timelines, ongoing indicates projects that already have value and will be evaluated for agency fit and cost; one-year projects are being examined for effectiveness in northeast Washington.

1. Reflective collars and bells for cattle

Purpose: One of the most time-consuming activities for range riders is locating cattle. One of those ways we have tried to address this is through the purchase of reflective collars and bells that are placed on cattle. We would like to compare the cost versus effectiveness of bells versus cattle VHF ear tags on collars. We have already deployed about 150 collars to nine producers. The bells are made by a local high school.

Timeline: Ongoing project timeline, collars already deployed. This is an expansion of a smaller project.

2. VHF ear tags for cattle

Purpose: One of the most time-consuming activities for range riders is locating cattle. One way we have tried to address this is through the purchase of reflective collars and bells (see 1). We would also like to try VHF tags on collared cattle (depending on herd size, collar lead cows). VHF ear tags will be used as a more cost-effective way to test if bells or VHF tracking of cattle is a viable option. Staff already have several receivers but will need to purchase additional antenna.

Timeline: One-year project timeline. Funds approved, waiting on ear tags from WSU.

3. VHF notification beacons

Purpose: In other countries, portable beacons are used to alert (via email or text) when animals (cattle or carnivores) leave or enter a designated area. These portable beacons can be used on large grazing settings in situations to exclude or confine cattle to desired areas.

Conversely, if carnivores are collared, the frequencies can be used in the same fashion.

Timeline: One-year project timeline. Funds approved, working with developer.

4. Deterrent stockpiles for community use

Purpose: Currently, there is not a large stockpile of deterrents (fladry, fox lights, flood lights, etc.) dispersed throughout the district for use by livestock producers, other NGOs, and WDFW. This total includes 60 foxlights, eight sections fladry, 10 spotlights, airhorns, and batteries for foxlights.

Timeline: One-year project timeline. Stockpiles available during 2020.

5. InReach GPS

Purpose: To allow for timely response to depredations, availability of real time communication to range riders while in the field without cell service and providing online real time downloadable track logs. This is a safety feature for remote areas where we have had severe injuries to riders in the past. Also, these devices address previously identified concerns with accountability for range riders and promotes a more interactive approach between range riders, program administrators, and producers.

Timeline: One-year project timeline. Units purchased and deployed in 2020.

6. Cattle ear tags – pilot

Purpose: This is part of a pilot project for ear tags that collect information on cattle biometrics including stress. Stress can be an indicator of disturbance (e.g., carnivore, other novel disturbance). This package includes 25 ear tags, a reader, and one-year of application subscription.

Timeline: One-year project timeline. Funding approved, working with developer for deployment.

7. Post-grazing season cattle detection flights

Purpose: To provide an alternative for detecting unaccounted cattle on USFS grazing allotments after the annual grazing season has ended. Once producers have made a concerted effort to locate and gather unaccounted cattle from their respective allotments, they will provide WDFW staff with their list of unaccounted cattle by the end of each season. WDFW staff will compile a tally of all the cattle in the District 1 that were unaccounted for. During routine wildlife survey flights after the first substantial snowstorm, WDFW staff will spend time looking in grazing areas for livestock. By waiting for decent snow accumulation, observers will be more apt to detect cattle on the landscape. This will help reduce the likelihood of cattle on the allotments throughout the winter that may be susceptible to wolf depredation. By trying to find unaccounted cattle, wolves may be less likely to become

habituated with preying on livestock. This will also help reduce the number of indirect claims that WDFW pays for livestock loss each year.

Timeline: To be determined

8. Hunter reporting on public lands

Purpose: Through coordination with the USFS, WDFW staff will place signs at strategic locations on USFS lands that notify hunters and recreators to keep an eye out for unaccounted cattle and instruct them to report their observations to either the USFS or WDFW Conflict staff. Since hunters and recreators are already on the landscape and since they greatly outnumber government employees, they are more likely to detect unaccounted cattle. This will help reduce the amount of cattle that are left on allotments throughout the winter that may be susceptible to wolf depredation. By trying to find these cattle, wolves may be less likely to become habituated with preying on livestock. This will also help reduce the number of indirect claims that WDFW pays for livestock loss each year.

Timeline: To be determined

DRAFT – last edited 5/27/2020

[Insert in draft protocol in non-lethal tool section for range riding]

Range riding activities	Range riders funded by		
	WDFW	WSDA Grant Recipients	Livestock Producer
Before livestock are turned out, monitor, scout for and identify (near daily ¹) signs of wolf activity in areas where livestock will graze.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Once livestock are turned out, observe livestock health and behavior (near daily ¹), to look for signs of stress that may indicate wolves are nearby and testing livestock vulnerability and identify potential wolf (and other carnivore) activity around livestock. Notify Wildlife Conflict Specialist as needed in a timely manner.	Yes	Yes	Yes
If wolves are seen in close proximity to livestock, range riders should opportunistically haze the wolves (in the federally de-listed portion of the state).	Yes	Yes	--
Locate any livestock carcasses and secure them if the cause of death is suspected to be from a carnivore. Notify the Wildlife Conflict Specialist of the location for an investigation of the cause of death and disposal (when possible).	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assist with sanitation measures outlined in this protocol. Notify the livestock producer and the WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialist to coordinate disposal if possible and desirable.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Work extended hours (may include nightly) during periods or in areas of significant or increasing wolf activity. Staying on site may be necessary for multiple days as work areas can be remote.	Yes	Yes	--
Manage livestock consistent with the requirements of the lessor's grazing permit and grazing plan on either public or private ground. Livestock management and movement is the sole responsibility of the livestock producer. A range rider may assist with livestock management when authorized by a livestock producer.	May assist when authorized by livestock producer	May assist when authorized by livestock producer	Yes
If sick or injured livestock are discovered, consult with the livestock producer to provide care and/or remove (if necessary and possible).	May assist when authorized by	May assist when authorized by	Yes

	livestock producer	livestock producer	
When available and if desired, use wolf location data as a tool to help identify that wolves are in the area (to avoid potential areas of conflict such as den and rendezvous sites).	Yes	Yes	Yes
If negative interactions between wolves and livestock occur, range riders will work with the livestock producer and WDFW Conflict Specialist on feasible strategies to mitigate conflict.	Yes	May assist when authorized by livestock producer and coordinate with WDFW	Yes
Required to complete daily logs and turn them into the WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialist monthly or more frequently, as requested by WDFW.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Use GPS waypoints, geo-referenced photos, or another locating tool to document daily activities (Add standardization about how often? At least daily?)	Yes ¹	Yes	At livestock producer's discretion ¹ , if not using state funding
<p>¹ Near daily is generally 4-5 days per week, but allows the rider to remain adaptable to the situation and needs. Range riding presence depends on the number of people assigned to areas, and individuals' time may be allotted to priority areas or specific times of day. With location-based range rider data, can demonstrate range rider activity. Having an exact definition of "near daily" in the protocol may not accurately reflect the dynamic nature of a range rider's job or priority areas.</p> <p>² Includes both WDFW contracted range riders and those funded by WDFW DPCA-Ls cost share agreements.</p>			