

March 18, 2023 - Fish and Wildlife Commission
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Blue sheet briefing and discussion: WDFW's nonlethal wolf management program

Areas of chronic conflict and conflict mitigation plans – background

Starting in December 2018, the [Wolf Advisory Group \(WAG\)](#) began dedicating time during their meetings to discussing areas where conflict between wolves and livestock appeared to be focused and recur annually. Some members started to question whether the guidance provided in the [2017 wolf-livestock interaction protocol](#) (Protocol) resulted in the desired outcome of fewer depredations in certain areas that seemed prone to wolf-livestock conflict. The elimination of the Profanity Peak pack in 2016, followed by the subsequent recolonization and removal of the Old Profanity Territory (OPT) pack in 2018 and 2019, followed by the recolonization of the Kettle pack in 2019, all in the same geographic pack territory, underscored this question.

The WAG decided to create a new section of the Protocol specifically dedicated to areas of chronic conflict and spent all or portions of their meetings from 2019 through April 2021 working on this subject. WAG discussed at length the development of collaborative, proactive conflict mitigation plans (CMPs) to address areas of chronic wolf-livestock conflict.

The WAG invested significant time in the section but ultimately was not able to reach consensus on the guidance provided by this section. In 2021, WAG recommended that WDFW staff use WAG input to date to develop proactive CMPs as a pilot project to see if implementing plan actions would reduce livestock depredations and wolf removals in these challenging situations.

Using input from the WAG, WDFW planned on having several meetings with affected livestock producers in the Togo pack territory to collect information for the CMP. Livestock producers declined to have group meetings to discuss their operations and preferred individual meetings. WDFW also invited the two range rider NGO (Cattle Producers of Washington and Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative) coordinators and the Ferry/Stevens County Wildlife Specialist per the producers' request to assist in coordinating range riding and nonlethal tools for each affected producer.

WDFW staff drafted a [preliminary version](#) of a CMP for affected livestock producers in the Togo pack territory for the 2022 grazing season with information gathered from the meetings. With a goal of receiving comment and input prior to finalization, WDFW shared the draft plan with affected livestock producers, range rider NGOs, county personnel, and Forest Service personnel on May 13, 2022. Expectations were developed for all producers and specific livestock operations in the designated chronic conflict area as well as for WDFW staff.

Affected livestock producers and community members requested an in-person meeting to discuss the draft CMP. This meeting was held in Curlew on May 31, 2022. Those who had reviewed the document had extensive concerns with the draft and made it clear that they would not participate in the plan as written. They felt they had not been sufficiently included in the plan development process and that the plan's expectations for WDFW regarding lethal control of wolves were not definitive enough. Livestock producers expected that if they participated in the CMP and implemented a prescribed list of nonlethal tools, WDFW would immediately authorize lethal

removal once depredation thresholds had been met, rather than considering the individual circumstances of the scenario or additional reactive nonlethal measures. Under current management, every scenario in which lethal removal is considered is unique and a recommendation is developed based on the facts of the situation and whether reactive nonlethal measures would be expected to mitigate depredation, not by following a prescribed list that automatically results in lethal control if specific nonlethal measures are implemented proactively.

Complicating matters, depredations in the Togo pack territory in 2022 started on May 17, 2022 (the only area of chronic conflict at the time). Livestock depredation in the Togo pack territory has been chronic since the pack's discovery in 2017, with only a single wolf removed by WDFW during that time period until 2022 (WDFW removed two Togo wolves in June 2022). These circumstances created consternation in the community, specifically about Togo and the past lethal removal success, and fueled a lack of willingness to collaborate on a plan with WDFW.

The separate but concurrent [wolf-livestock conflict deterrence rule making](#) effort also created confusion for livestock producers and community members (and some WDFW staff) in understanding the difference between a collaborative, co-developed CMP as a pilot project versus a Governor-mandated, imposed rule. We included provisions for CMPs in Alternatives 2 and 3 of the wolf-livestock rule proposals in recognition of their significance and history to the WAG, Governor's office, WDFW, and some factions of the public.

WDFW remains supportive of developing and implementing CMPs in areas of chronic conflict. However, we believe these plans will only be supported if they are developed collaboratively with affected livestock producers and community members. In addition, in our discussions with those affected, it is clear the expectation of a higher standard for proactive, nonlethal deterrence must be tied to more definitive expectations for lethal removal of wolves for willing participation and collaboration to occur.

WDFW heard clearly from the affected livestock producers that they want in writing what specific proactive nonlethal deterrence measures they need to implement (listed in the CMP) to guarantee that WDFW will authorize lethal removal of wolves and not continue to add reactive nonlethal tools or consider other factors in decision making.