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Section 9. Special focus areas (SFAs) for recurrent conflict mitigation

Definition

A Special Focus Area (SFA) is a geographic area (e.g., all or a portion of a pack territory) where livestock depredations occurred and incremental lethal removal of wolves was authorized in two of the last three years.¹

Goal

The shared goal within a Special Focus Area (SFA) is to minimize livestock depredations in areas that have experienced recurrent and significant levels of conflict, and consequently reduce the need for lethal removal of wolves.

The Department's decision to establish a SFA is a recognition that repeated livestock loss and wolf removals are likely to cause significant hardship for producers and their animals, as well as their communities, wolf packs, the wolf advocate community, and WDFW staff.

Designation of an SFA

The Director may designate a SFA when the definition is met.

Assessment

Once a SFA is designated, Department staff will conduct an assessment of the existing conflict mitigation efforts. The assessment must include conversations with affected producers, associated landowners, range riders, representative of the county sheriff if applicable, and land management agencies (hereafter referred to as "the group") further inform the potential causes for the recurrent or increase in livestock depredations in the SFA. The assessment will include an evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, effectiveness, and timeliness of the mitigation efforts staff and other involved parties have taken within the SFA for the past three years. Groups formed to conduct the assessment are strongly encouraged to seek outside expertise from individuals or entities who have experience with reducing wolf-livestock conflict and improving human-carnivore coexistence. These experts should be mutually agreed upon by the group. Comments from the external experts will be included in the assessment document. This assessment document forms the basis for Special Focus Area mitigation plans (the deliverable).

SFA Conflict Mitigation Plan

Once a SFA is designated, Department staff, working in coordination with the group who conducted the assessment, will develop a SFA conflict mitigation plan focused on adaptive alternatives that seek to reduce or eliminate additional loss of livestock and attempt to break the need for repeated lethal

¹ In areas not designated as SFAs but where wolf-livestock conflict has resulted in lethal removal authorization for one year, it is standard practice for WDFW staff to emphasize these areas in planning for the upcoming grazing season.

Commented [MD(1)]: Is anyone missing from this list (e.g., NGOs)?

Commented [MD(2)]: Changed from "decisions made" to "mitigation efforts"

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removal of wolves in these areas. In developing the plan, the group will focus on non-lethal wolf deterrence methods and techniques designed to reduce wolf-livestock interactions.

The group must complete the conflict mitigation plan, working with affected livestock producers, prior to beginning of the next grazing season. Changes can be made to the plan, including requiring additional types of non-lethal deterrents, during the grazing season only with the agreement of the affected producers and the Department.

The conflict mitigation plan may include the use of:

- Methods that are currently known to have the highest potential for being effective and easily adapted through the grazing season as more is understood about effectiveness.
- Additional non-lethal deterrents and the underlying reasoning for why this new approach will provide additional benefit.
- Enhanced proactive non-lethal deterrents, if they are available, what those deterrents are, how they will be used and the underlying reason for why this new approach will provide additional benefit.
- Outside expertise from individuals or entities who have experience with reducing wolf-livestock conflict and improving human-carnivore coexistence. These experts should be mutually agreed upon by the group.

The Department will:

- Make best efforts to place one GPS conflict collar and one long-term monitoring collar on wolves within the SFA. At least one of these collars should have the capability to change daily fix rate (and download frequency, if applicable) prior to deployment or remotely. The Department will work with affected producers to establish fix rates that meet their needs. Fix rates will, at a minimum, be set to attempt four fixes per day.
- Establish additional criteria/techniques within the conflict mitigation plan that will be implemented by affected producers, WDFW, land managers, and cooperating NGOs. In some cases, this could include modified trapping schedules in an attempt to change wolf behavior.
- Make GPS collar information available to DPCA-L users and to state and self-funded range riders and to county sheriff's departments with data sharing agreements to inform producers of potential problem areas and depredation sites. The Department will set GPS conflict collar parameters to download wolf locations every 6 hours (see [limitations of data sharing system and GPS collars](#)).
- And other entities to deploy nonlethal deterrents at least two weeks prior to livestock turnout with the assistance of livestock producers after turnout.

Lethal Removal Decisions in a SFA

If implementation of SFA mitigation plans fail to prevent depredations that reach thresholds established in Section 6, lethal removal may be authorized as described in sections 6 and 7 of the protocol.

Commented [MD(3)]: Does changing this to "livestock producers and county government officials" meet the need, with an understanding the both are communication daily to the range riders? Or we could restate language in range rider definition, "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)."

Commented [MD(4)]: Changing the satellite-to-mainframe download schedule doesn't guarantee the location data has been uploaded from the collar to the satellite. So WDFW staff made content edits in this bullet to reflect that we can change the "setting" (pending IT feedback).

Commented [MD(5)]: Is the intent in this bullet the same as what is stated in the range rider definition, "Before livestock are turned out, monitor, scout for and identify...signs of wolf activity in areas where livestock will graze?"

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Discussion items for next WAG engagement:

Questions regarding the need and impacts of a Section 9 that must be answered:

- What happens if the department fails to meet their obligations under the SFA mitigation plan?
- What happens when a producer operating in an SFA will not sign a mitigation plan?
- Can a plan be required if the producer has not agreed to it?
- Who is responsible for placing and maintaining enhanced nonlethal methods on public land?
- What are the requirements for how rancher logs for range riding or human presence will be kept and recorded?
- What are enhanced proactive non-lethal deterrents? How do enhanced proactives differ from additional non-lethals?

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