Identifying Gray Wolves in Washington

Wolf facts and road-killed wolf response protocol

With the recent discovery of an apparent wolf (confirmation awaits DNA analysis) killed on I-90 west of Snoqualmie Pass, 4 wolves are known to have been killed on Washington highways in recent years. Washington’s native wolf population was eliminated in the 1930s. Wolves did not start naturally returning to the region from neighboring territories until the 1990s. The current population is growing, at the pace about 30% per year. Wolves remain federally listed as an endangered species in the western two-thirds of our state.

If you find a wolf dead on the roadside, please move it, if necessary, to eliminate any hazard to motorists. If you are west of the line formed by US 907, SR 017, and SR 395 (north to south), call: USFWS Enforcement (Eric Marek) — (206) 512-9329

For all other wolves, call the WDFW regional office:

Regional offices
Region 1—Spokane: (509) 892-1001
Region 2—Ephrata: (509) 754-4242
District Office—Wenatchee: (509) 662-0452
Region 3—Yakima: (509) 575-2740
Region 4—Moses Creek: (425) 775-1311
Region 5—Vancouver: (360) 696-6211
Region 6—Montesano: (360) 245-8028

Contrary to their name, gray wolves can be a number of different colors. Their coats can be gray, red, brown, white, or, like the most recent sighting, black.

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Washington Wolf Monitoring and Management Update

Scott Becker, WDFW Wolf Specialist
Monitoring
- Trapping
- Aerial captures
- Capture/monitoring update
- Known mortalities
- Data sharing and radio collars

Management
- Number of confirmed livestock losses by year
- Number of packs depredating on livestock by year
- Number of confirmed livestock losses by month: 2015
- DPCA-Ls
Minimum Known Number of Wolves by Year
Minimum Known Number of Packs by Year

- **E Washington**
- **N Cascades**
- **S Cascades and NW Coast**
Minimum Known Number of Breeding Pairs by Year

- E Washington
- N Cascades
- S Cascades and NW Coast
Trapping

- Identifying priorities
- Conduct intensive monitoring
  - If they aren’t there, we won’t catch anything no matter how pretty our sets are
  - Put in position for success
  - Set on sign
  - PATIENCE & PERSISTENCE
- At least 1 collar in as many packs as possible
Aerial Captures

- Target packs with functional collars only
2015 Capture/Monitoring Update

- **2015 Captures**
  - Wolves: 15
  - Packs: 9 (plus 1 lone wolf)

- **Monitoring**
  - Wolves: 15
  - Packs: 10 (plus 1 disperser)

- Continue to follow-up on clusters of public sighting reports to identify areas of potential new activity
Known Mortalities: 2015

- 2 human-caused
- 1 unknown cause
- 1 under investigation
- 1 legal harvest (ID)
Future of Wolf Monitoring

- More challenges as more wolves occupy landscape
- Developing alternative population estimation techniques
Number of Confirmed Livestock Losses by Year in WA
Number of Packs Depredating on Livestock by Year in WA
Number of Confirmed Livestock Losses by Month: 2015

- Cattle
- Sheep

Bar chart showing the number of confirmed mortalities by month. The highest number of deaths occurred in July.
Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements for Livestock

• Coordination with local conflict staff
  • Preventive measures specific to each operation
  • Cost-share option
  • 23 producers signed DPCA-Ls in 2015

• Currently under revision
  • More permanent funding
  • Create criteria for priority areas
  • Review of tools and most effective and efficient ways to implement
  • Assistance from WAG
Questions??
Definitions

- **Pack**
  - Two or more wolves traveling together in a defined territory

- **Successful breeding pair**
  - Male and female raising two or more pups until Dec 31
Federal Status

- Eastern 1/3 Washington
  - Federally delisted in 2011

- Western 2/3 Washington
  - Federally listed as endangered under ESA

- No federal wolf recovery requirements
  - USFWS proposal to delist wolves in remainder of lower 48 (2013)
  - Decision still pending
State Status

- Endangered species statewide
- Wolf Conservation and Management Plan: 2011
  - 3 recovery areas
  - Delisting requirements
- Federal, state, tribal management
Data Sharing & Radio Collars

- Data sharing web maps
  - Unique system with many moving parts
  - New technology will always have some minor glitches

- GPS collars
  - Expectation to perform for purposes not originally designed for
  - Variation in fix rate success and transmission rates
  - Influenced by: weather, landscape, satellite configuration, battery, and wear/damage (i.e., internet or cell service)
Best Times to Trap

- Late spring/early summer
Best Times to Trap

- Late summer/early fall
Wolf Advisory Group

• 18 members representing various stakeholder groups
  • Appointed by WDFW Director

• Mission
  • Allow a diverse group of stakeholders to advise WDFW on implementation of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan
Livestock Compensation Panel

- Panel members soon to be appointed by Director
- Review claims submitted for indirect losses

- Provide recommendation to WDFW for payment
- Indirect losses
  - Greater than normal losses
  - Reduced weight gain
  - Reduced pregnancy rates
Interagency Wolf Committee
Communication Plan

1. Full Committee meetings

The majority of the communication and coordination will occur during scheduled meetings. Meeting topics will vary, but will be associated with implementation of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.

2. Email updates to Full Committee

WDFW will also send out periodic updates to the entire committee on items the group wishes to be informed about, such as:

- Wolf captures
- Confirmation of new wolf pack
- Confirmed wolf mortality or injury
- Confirmed wolf depredation on livestock
- Lethal removal of wolves (agency action or permit to producer to kill wolves)
- Relocation of wolves
- Wolf presentations at public forums (e.g., Commission meetings, town-hall meetings; excludes smaller events)
- Annual reports
- Final products from Wolf Advisory Group

3. Regional communication and field level coordination

Regional communications between agencies/tribes occurs regularly for field level operations and typically will not be included in email updates to the Interagency Wolf Committee. These are likely to include items such as:

- Start-stop dates for trapping and helicopter captures
- Wolf camera, track, and howling surveys
- Confirmed wolf activity in new areas
- Confirmed denning activity
- Community meetings on conflict preventative measures
- Wolves mingling with or pursuing livestock
- Reported and unconfirmed depredations
- Confirmed depredations where the predator species is not wolves or is unknown
Why does WDFW graze?

• Manipulate vegetation for fish and wildlife
• Accomplish specific habitat objective
• Facilitate coordinated resource management

(Policy C-6003)
Other Regulatory Guidance

• WAC
• SEPA
• Department Strategic Plan
• Individual wildlife area management plans
• Species Recovery Plans
• (Habitat Conservation Plan)
• (Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances)
Fish and Wildlife Commission Requirements

- Maintain ecological integrity
- Cross-program review
- Grazing management plan
- Coordinated resource management and adaptive management encouraged
WDFW Grazing Permits
(not shown)

~50 permits
~10,000 AUM’s
~70,000 acres
Grazing Management Plans

- History, purpose, regulatory environment
- Resource description
- Goals and objectives
- Grazing prescription
- Effects and assessment
- Issues and contingencies
- Monitoring plan
“To use the term ‘grazing’ in a generic sense is meaningless.”

(Borman 2005)
Grazing prescription

- Type of livestock
- Intensity (stocking rate)
- Season, duration, frequency
- Pasture layout
Ecological Integrity

• Analogous to federal concept of rangeland health
  – Soil and site stability
  – Hydrologic function
  – Biotic integrity
Monitoring

• Compliance
• Effectiveness

→ Adaptive management
Cowiche/Worrell unit, Emerick Permit
Range Trend Plot #4, Line 2, 120 degrees
Loamy 15+ PZ, Columbia Plateau Steppe and Grassland
18 April 2013
Permittee Requirements

• Contact availability
• Infrastructure maintenance
• Dates, reports
7. CHANGE IN SIZE OF AREA AND CHANGE IN NUMBER OF AUM’S IN ALLOTMENT: WDFW reserves the right to alter and change the provisions of the grazing use plan to include reduction in acres of pasture available and number of AUMs authorized when WDFW determines that such changes are required to benefit fish or wildlife management or public hunting and other recreational uses.