

Interagency Wolf Committee Meeting
March 25, 2015

Welcome/Introductions: Dave Ware welcomed everyone and introductions were made around the room (and over the phone). Dave encouraged recommendations of new members.

Washington Wolf Status Update

Donny gave a brief overview of status of wolves in the state, including capturing, monitoring, and depredation management. He reviewed the four main goals of the Wolf Plan. With conflict, lethal control, and ungulate relations, wolves are very unique from other listed species. Recovery zones were reviewed, as well as recovery objectives. Donny defined what a successful breeding pair is, and how they differ from a confirmed pack. At least four breeding pairs need to be in each of the three recovery zones.

Donny showed a map of the confirmed wolf packs in the state. Washington has 16 confirmed packs. New packs are added every year, and changes happen rapidly as we go into the future. He went over the difference between federal and state listing. Washington has 5 successful breeding pairs as of now. Breeding pairs have adult male, adult female, and two pups survive the year. Other recruitment is going on, but these instances do not meet the metric. This is why Smackout is not considered a successful breeding pair at this time. Lookout is similar as well.

All of our confirmed information is minimum, including packs, breeding pairs, and minimum population counts. We will be working to get a more realistic count of wolf populations and numbers. Growth rate trends (38%) are from what WDFW is seeing in the state. As populations increase, wolf mortalities are more frequent. Washington's wolf mortality factors are in line with other Rocky Mountain states. The proportion of minimum population removed is about half of what it is in Rocky Mountain states.

Question: Has the growth rate plateaued in states where wolves have been active longer?

Answer: That has happened, mostly by design in states such as Idaho who are trying to curb growth. No decline has been detected.

Breeding pairs likely look more like the wolf pack growth rates, rather than the plateau at five.

WDFW's website has a reporting tool for wolf sightings. This tool is used by WDFW to try to determine where to find the new packs/breeding pairs. WDFW does not respond to each report. We look for greatest chances of validity. When there is evidence of a pack (two animals traveling together through winter), we act. Trail cameras are put up, etc. The goal is to collar that pack and add them to the monitoring system. Helicopter captures are done in the winter, while foothold traps are used during warmer months. Once one collar is with the pack, we move on to the next pack. The goal is to have two collars in each pack, though it is a challenging goal. We try to have a GPS collar in each pack, as well as a conventional VHF collar. Each has benefits and shortcomings.

Field Activities

Monitoring activities include: Trail cameras, ground surveys, trapping, helicopter captures, and mortality investigations. Conflict activities include: hazing, range riders, trapping for removal, and helicopter for removal. WDFW does not investigate den & rendezvous sites, as they are not priority for recovery. Trapping occurs almost every day from mid-April to September. Some packs are higher on the priority list due to a number of different factors. All trapping is on public lands. Most traps are on a dirt road where there is traffic. Wolves travel these roads during the night. We want to monitor whose property we are on when darting wolves from a helicopter as well. Coordination is incredibly important, especially when dealing with certain activities that may impact PR or other topics. This includes conflict activities like depredation responses and lethal control. Outreach is important over multiple agencies so we can all be on the same page when these things occur.

Wolf Monitoring and Management Discussion

Russ: Plan is similar from Oregon to Washington. Oregon's wolves increasing as well, though slowing down slightly. 15 known groups, 9 packs. 77 minimum. 8 breeding pairs. 7 of those pairs in the eastern part of the state. Still using older definition of pack, which is four or more members traveling together in winter. Similar methodologies for monitoring, collaring, etc. One issue with collaring is how data is given out. When one thing happens that can be perceived as favored, the other state hears from the public about how they should do it as well. Phase 2 of plan enacted in Oregon this year. It prompts startup of process to delist wolves. Status review will happen with Commission on April 24. Two thirds of Oregon is federally listed, while whole state is state listed. Within state, the old pack definition, but cooperative reports list as new definition.

Donny: Coordination between states is incredibly important, especially with wolves that cross state boundaries. This relationship works very well with Oregon. Washington could improve this sort of coordination with Idaho and BC.

Russ: One approach Oregon takes is that when a wolf crosses state lines, it is no longer the state's wolf. As more and more animals are collared, this relationship should keep up.

Rich and Eric (Colville Tribe): Monitoring is similar to Department as well. One thing to add is the scat collection. DNA analysis is fairly extensive within the reservation. It identifies numbers of existing packs as well as new wolves. It serves nicely as a third method for population monitoring. Numbers are usually within one animal, so these methods are fairly accurate. Ground trapping and winter aerial captures are done as well. Packs haven't grown a lot, so there haven't been many new animals to collar. Camera work is done as well, though cameras do not always get every animal.

Donny: At those times when news changes quickly and plans must be adjusted quickly, there may be potential issues. In late summer/early fall of last year, there were depredations in Profanity Pack area. There was urgency to get a collar, and WDFW may have stepped on toes in the Colville tribe, though it wasn't intentional.

Rick and Eric: Did not feel like they were pushed out of trapping Profanity at all. Coordination on the north half is moving ahead nicely. Communication is regular. Sometimes upper management may communicate and not let the people on the ground know until later, which can be irritating. Priorities for this year are Whitestone and Profanity. The rendezvous site monitoring model can be useful. Stay away from dens until well after the animals have left.

Russ: Rendezvous and den sites are kept track of, but not monitored too closely, which is similar to WDFW's approach. Sometimes that information can help with other agency projects (land access, etc.) While den sites are not made public, ranchers are worked with closely on case by case basis.

Travis: Could Profanity Pack collar data be shared if Colville tribe collars one of the animals?

Rick and Eric: Shared all collar data with WDFW, and they have likewise shared their data with us. We've been fairly open with each other when it comes to collar data. It shouldn't matter which collar it is, since the two agencies are moving toward the same goal. As long as data is being shared.

Donny: The issue comes from when it's a Department collar being able to be shared with producers, versus tribal collar data being shared with producers. So, in Profanity case, would the collar data be shared with ranchers, no matter which collar it is. When we give a collar to a tribe, that data will belong to them. They can share with WDFW, but then ask us not to share with producers.

Eric (Colville Tribe): We've always been very forthcoming with sharing data to producers and ranchers in the area. Never heard from any superiors that that is not okay to do.

Donny: State has a program where live data is shared through an agreement with producers. The difference comes from sharing old data versus this new, up-to-the-minute data.

Ray: Participating in BMI IMI from Idaho. Most wolf encounters come through cameras while monitoring for all carnivores. Wolf activity has increased, especially with splitting and dispersal of Diamond Pack. Collaring efforts will start for that pack. Potential impacts on the reservation are high for the population of user groups. Tribal membership is becoming more and more concerned and are asking more questions. Concerns over bison herd and caribou. A little disappointed in the level of sharing of information. Wants to receive information directly from state right away rather than from contacts in fisheries.

Mark (Yakama Reservation): Don't have any formal monitoring going on, but informal monitoring is picking up. Quite a bit of wolf activity on reservation, including tracks, howling, and visual observations. Klickitat area saturated with cameras from late last year. As access increases, checks will happen. Activity increasing every year. Shouldn't be more than one or two years before something is confirmed on the reservation. Probably won't increase monitoring until confirmation of packs. Definitely want to collar wolves, but funding needs to be figured

out. Tribal council has been pretty silent on the issue so far. Hopefully the issue is discussed sooner rather than later. If a pack is confirmed, the issue may be forced with tribal council.

Donny: We want to be there and be available to help as you move forward with monitoring issues.

Mark: Confrontation may be present with certain areas. Coordination has occurred on other projects with WDFW, so the biologists want to improve that relationship.

Angela: Very much involved with wolf recovery in Idaho. At this point, not actively monitoring or collaring wolves in Washington area. More interested in coordination information sharing in that lower corner of Washington State at this point. Updates on what is happening in those areas. Leadership does not want to hear these updates from the newspaper. The earlier the better. Leadership wants to hear from upper management on these issues. How does claiming packs work? Who figures out who gets to claim packs?

Donny: Great question. With den site information, if there is a history of that den site being in one state or the other, that state gets to claim the pack. In the case of Tucannon, they've been in the Blue Mountains for a long period of time now. If they spend a lot of time in Washington but den in Oregon every year, that information may be revisited.

Carl: Echo concerns of Angela and Ray. Poor coordination so far with WDFW. One of largest landowners in Columbia County, and number of staff sighting wolves. We would be happy to work with WDFW so they can have access to that property for trapping and monitoring. No requests have been made at this point. We've been investigating kill sights and scat. Management plan mimics the state's plan in numerous ways. Umatilla Reservation wolves are not listed. No take permitted on reservation outside of same basic restrictions of state. We would like to coordinate with WDFW.

Roger Christoferson: We are still actively monitoring the suspect pack on the boundary of Canada. Received message today from the area with photo of one animal close to Washington side. Tracks and scat have been found. There is activity there, but it hasn't been nailed down yet. Monitoring will continue with cameras.

Eric (Colville): Public release information, newspapers, etc. Going into removal post depredation has been one area where Colville Tribes and WDFW have not seen eye to eye. In Wedge Pack situation, felt that decision to remove pack came from WDFW more than Colville and without much communication. We will have to work on that.

John (Forest Service): No direct program to monitor wolves. Indirect from other carnivore monitoring. Looking at historic as well as live telemetry information on packs, dens, etc. Livestock management, forest activities, and special use permits can be affected by these data. Would like to see appropriate data sharing at the right time, right place. Some processes could use permitting on our part, and we can work on those with WDFW so there are no issues in the future.

Roger Woodruff (Wildlife Services): Work closely with WDFW when responding to depredation cases. Sets up coordinating relationship out of necessity. Like to see some sort of single agreement with each entity that would be simple, rather than coordinating separately with each one. Would like to get that done within three months if possible.

Angela: Any actions on federal lands within tribal resources or areas of interest need to be coordinated and consulted with the tribes. This includes management and removal of wolves. Tribes don't want to hear about it after the fact.

Eric (USFWS): Service provides funding to partnering states. 50,000 per year goes to state wildlife agency to monitor how they so choose. This will be last year we receive that. Advocacy for more funds will most likely net no gain.

John: We can chart a path forward with this permitting issue and streamline it as much as possible.

Data Sharing Coordination

Donny: Forest Practice Applications – Trying to put a buffer around active den sites so there is no disturbance. WAC 222-16-080 Critical habitats of (state) threatened and endangered species. Harvesting, road construction, or site preparation within 1 mile from den site between March 15 and July 30 or .25 miles from den site at other times of year. If we knew of a den site, that information would be shared, but since we aren't looking for den sites, we don't have that info. This may change as we move forward. One stage we are approaching is a population viability analysis of Washington wolves. We are getting to stage where we can update analysis with Washington data. As we do that, we may start looking at den sites so we can get litter survival, etc. As den sites are discovered, those locations would be shared.

John (Forest Service): Both Oregon and WA, consultations have determined greater sensitivity within these den areas. Knowing where the den sites are determines how much consultation work we need to do for that process.

Donny: Silent on rendezvous sites as well. Not a priority in terms of monitoring, impacts, etc. Not anywhere in our plan as far as importance.

John: All of that information on sensitivity around den sites would be good to have so it would help with our processes.

Donny: Feedback has told us that now is not the right time to revisit the WAC. In the future, as data comes up that wolves are actually resilient and can deal with these disturbances fairly well, the WAC could be amended.

Donny: Data Sharing – Sharing raw location data with members of the public. When we shared spotted owl, we gained experience that we could build off of. There is a flexibility to share wolf locations with the public. We developed a program to share data with livestock producers. This started about 3 years ago. There is a protocol for this program. It has to be livestock grazing in a

known pack territory. That livestock entity has to be working with WDFW (contract, conflict specialist, etc.) We want to encourage non-lethal tools. Works well with the range rider concept. The rider can use the data to do his or her job much better. One issue is that the collared wolf may not be where the rest of the pack is around the herd. Livestock entity not allowed to pass data along. They sign an agreement for that. System has a couple safeguards (IP addresses, number of looks). It is something we are concerned about as far as an abuse issue. County governments have stepped forward wanting the data. Existing protocols were in place for sensitive data with counties. We treated this the same way. The users do not see all the data, and the data is not available for the entire year. They see the last two weeks of data, since that is what is important to them. There is also a blackout period where producers can't see, but counties can (coincides with denning periods). They learn not only where the animal is, but can develop an understand of activity history.

More folks have asked to have access to data. It goes to producers, to counties, etc. We have more flexibility to share with other government bodies and tribes as long as that need fits with the reasons that we can share the data.

Dave Ware: Still some sensitivity, since limiting shared data is not always true of all agencies. We have to be very careful with the data.

Donny: For that concern, we are more conservative with sharing raw data with other agencies.

Angela: Does it matter who funds the collection of the data? If tribe pays, is that their data? If tribe is contractor, will that data be available in accordance with federal law?

Donny: There are examples both ways in that. In western two thirds of the state, for a Teanaway wolf, the USFWS has the lead regardless of whose collar that is.

Angela: What about locations on private lands?

Donny: With the filter, they see everything we see over the last 14 days. We can mask, but we do not do that in most cases. There are some masking techniques we can use (for state boundaries, tribal boundaries, etc.). For example, when a wolf is on Washington side, that data is available, but when the wolf crosses to Oregon, that information is masked. With tribes, those tribes give us permission to share wolf activity when the wolf is not on tribal lands. When the wolf goes back on tribal lands, that data is masked.

Donny: The reason we collar wolves is to track recovery progress and assist in conflict if we need to. Now there is a desire from livestock owners that WDFW should collar every member of the pack because that is what they need. We are working through that now. We have about 20 folks right now between counties and producers.

Stephanie: Producers like this program and want more of it. We have to work on getting them to understand that we can't collar every wolf and packs spread out more. They want earlier info and aren't happy when the masking occurs. Best part is the range rider component of the preventive methods. It's been very useful.

Dave Ware: One concern, especially with the Teanaway female, is that people will use this data to hunt and poach wolves. Some environmental groups want us to stop doing this.

Stephanie: As people look at it, they look at it as a way to potentially prevent conflict, and they can understand the value there.

Russ: Originated to help prevent depredation. We have yet to see data that hints that ODFW system has done anything to prevent those conflicts. Are you sensing any situations where unintended recipients are getting info?

Stephanie: It is difficult to pinpoint if it's helping and if there has been misuse. As for misuse, we have not gotten any red flags to alert us to abuse. WSU is trying to assess some preventative tools. They have considered using this info. I know this data is used by range riders and it seems to be effective in those cases. Range riders have moved cattle and known wolves were nearby and no incidents occurred. Whether that was a result of the data or not, it was definitely used.

Donny: As tools get better and better, tribes and Oregon and Washington could get pushed by public to act as others do. One question is how long can we do this? What is the endgame? This is specific to wolves, and we do not want to set a precedent for future listed species.

Russ: ODFW will be back addressing this issue as well, as the plan will be reviewed, perhaps as soon as this year. Wants to see how these work in Washington and learn as much as possible.

Stephanie: It has given us the ability to improve the skillset of the range riders. They've even noted different signs and different patterns of behavior that they may not have noticed before.

Donny: Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming have not shared any data.

USFWS: What reason did counties give?

Donny: Same as producers. They want to make their producers aware of wolf locations. They can give information verbally.

Dave Ware: Other sensitive data can be shared by the counties with landowners as well. Wolves are no different. They don't seem to value it as much as they initially thought. They can warn producers if calving is going on and a wolf pack is near.

Donny: They don't use it enough to keep up with it.

Eric (Colville): I'm not sure what the tribe's stand would be on sharing real time data. What about ranchers and producers that fall within reservation boundaries? Would they get that data? State considers packs on Colville reservation as packs within state. Would producers within reservation boundaries be eligible for depredation payouts?

Dave Ware: I think that would depend on what the state and tribe agreed to and I think we could make it work if that was a priority for the tribe.

Eric (Colville): Would the tribe have the final say in determining whether it was a wolf depredation? Tribe would not be supportive of state animal conflict specialist coming on tribal lands and determining depredation. It would have to be someone from tribal fish and wildlife.

Dave Ware: There may be concern over one entity having control over another entity's funds. We should be able to work that out. We'll have to talk more about that separately.

John: Talked a lot about live data. What about historic data?

Donny: There is more flexibility for that type of information. From den site perspective, you tend to see reuse of den sites from time to time.

Wolf and Livestock Management

Stephanie gave an overview of WDFW's Wolf-Livestock Management. Managing wolf-livestock conflicts is part of the WDFW wolf management plan. There is still plenty of room to expand our actions and partners. She reviewed the five strategies to reduce and address livestock conflicts.

Stephanie gave an overview of where wildlife conflict staff are located throughout the state. In addition to conflict specialists, there are still district bios and other bios. These specialists do most of their work on the ground: meetings with producers, one-on-one visits, information exchanges. Partnerships with Wildlife Services, federal agencies, tribes, state agencies, counties and non-profit entities.

Proactive Prevention – encourage folks to think about non-lethal actions that they can use. Not every tool fits every scenario. The goal is to find what works best for each case. We've also been testing new tools to see how effective they might be.

One primary tool is a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement. 37 agreements across the state in 2014. Wolf areas were \$10,000 a piece. The cost was \$5,000 a piece in Klickitat County. Last year \$256,000 was committed statewide. Some producers don't sign agreement, but still may be working with our conflict specialists.

Trying to expand the Range Riding component. We decided that we could contract our own range riders and have met with fairly good success. Looking to expand even more this year and advertise for more people. The goal is at least six range riders, if not more.

Carcass composting site created for Sherman Creek WLA. Has shown to have effects in Montana. Want to add more locations across Washington State. Would be great to partner up where other entities may know a great spot for something like this.

Outreach is third area of focus. Spend a lot of time trying to get information out to as many folks as possible. Information and reporting methods include: hotline, online reporting, pamphlets, printed materials (brochures, etc.).

Wolf Advisory Group started with 9 members. It has now expanded to 18 members. They have been a good resource for providing outside, invested perspective. They are not afraid to tell us what they think about certain actions. On the conflict side, we've been able to improve and grow. This is still a new program, and can continue to grow as we go on.

Western Wildlife Outreach is a collaborative effort with WSU Extension. Includes a multi-media approach. Took well over a year to get to where we are with this project. Hopefully more will be finalized as we go on.

When considering lethal control, it will be an area where communication and coordination will be exceptionally important between entities.

Stephanie gave an overview of depredation cases, packs depredating, and comparisons to other states. She also covered new practices that the Department is developing for local deterrence plans. Once again recommended collaboration and cooperation within agencies and other entities for most effective plans of action.

Stephanie gave an overview of 2015 strategies.

Travis: WDFW range riders contractors, in areas where they are performing, is that always done with the landowners knowledge?

Stephanie: The work is always done with collaboration with the permittee.

Forest Service: That's good because you want to make sure there is a comfort level with the landowners.

Stephanie: Absolutely.

Travis: Contracted Range riding occurring on 14 allotments. It would be could for forest service to know which allotments the range riders are working. The conflict specialist map raises concern over workload and distributions.

Stephanie: The map is the fulltime conflict specialists. They are spread out how they are because they deal with multiple species, not just wolf. They deal with elk, deer, other carnivores, and even other species. We also hire additional people to assist our fulltime conflict specialists with the heavier workload.

Travis: I don't know how someone could keep up with tracking perhaps hundreds of livestock producers.

Stephanie: The agreement is in place to get people involved in non-lethal actions. Some producers who signed on early on are no longer on contract because they are doing it themselves now. The workload can be overwhelming, but as we move forward, we can get these producers involved and get them to take on some of this on their own.

Donny: The coordination we are hoping for is one strategy to help that workload issue. We want to get those preventative tools on the landscape and get them used. We can incorporate those tools through other places as well, and maybe spread out the workload a little bit.

Angela: Annual Operating Plans may be a good place to implement some of these measures. Over time, this can be terribly burdensome for WDFW.

Tom: We are doing that a little bit, implementing certain ideas into the Annual Operating Plans.

Angela: When that permit may reduce conflicts, it may be worth it to put that into those operating plans.

Coordination on Grazing

Stephanie highlighted that WDFW wants to identify allotments and producers potentially impacted in these situations. Work with land managers and other entities to continue a cooperative working relationship.

Caribou

Ray: Total population of caribou is 14. They are in a dire situation. The caribou is the most endangered mammal in North America. We're in a situation where this animal has been ignored to extinction.

Caribou are easy to count, especially in snow. Census is taken every year, formally by Idaho. Helicopter flights are done to take an accurate count. Launch out of Idaho, travel through Idaho, Washington, and through Canada and report any caribou sightings.

Population trends downwards. Typical predator/prey conflict where wolves increasing while caribou population trends downward. We were looking at recovery at a decent trajectory, but with wolf populations increasing, caribou went from 47 in 2009-10 to 14 today.

Population down to 14. Situation is bleak. We've pushed on it and reengagement has been committed with USFWS. Target liberal cougar hunting and wolf removal in BC & Idaho.

Last two locations of caribou in the United States are in Washington State in the NE corner. Predators need to be managed actively. Predators are the most critical threat to caribou today. US seeking to change status to threatened from endangered, which is the opposite direction.

Angela: Public comment has been reopened on that proposal.

Ray: Lawsuit came out on the critical habitat challenge about a day later.

Donny: Like you said, Ray, removal going on with hunting seasons, and with collaring there may be targeted removal going on. Washington has said we are not in a wolf removal stage at this point, but have no issue with WA wolves being taken outside WA. Wolf plan does allow to consider removal for the sake of other listed species.

Ray: Wolves have ability to reach higher elevations now, and caribou's only defense is deep snow and elevation. We need to encourage predator management and certainly there is room for action to support caribou recovery.

Dave Ware: Typically the state tries to review any plans on a five-year basis. We are a little behind on some critical species. Our next step is to evaluate whether there has been enough change to do a full blown status review of the wolf management plan. There is also a bill in the legislature to direct us to do that. We are more than likely reviewing the management plan.

Bin

Communication (Donny): We can set up a group email exchange that allows us to add items that will generate an update to the group. What scale would that update have to be to be important enough to get out to the group.

Dave Ware: This group would get different information and perhaps more in-depth information than the Wolf Advisory Group, so we will have to revisit that soon. WDFW will take care of that action.

Add Russ to mailing list.

Dave Ware: Probably try to schedule next meeting around the end of May.