

**Wolf Advisory Group  
January 7, 2022 Meeting Notes  
Zoom Meeting (Day 2)**

**WAG members:** Samee Charriere, Diane Gallegos, Todd Holmdahl, Jess Kayser, Jessica Kelley, Bill Kemp, Lynn Okita, Dan Paul, Rick Perleberg, Caitlin Scarano, Lisa Stone, and Paula Swedeen

**WDFW staff members:** Joey McCanna, Scott McCorquodale, Steve Pozzanghera, Annemarie Prince, Kevin Robinette, Trent Roussin, and Julia Smith

**WDFW Commissioners:** Lorna Smith

**Facilitation team:** Susan Hayman and Tristan Marquez

**Welcome and check-in**

Susan welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda for the day.

**Meeting Purpose**

Discuss how to evaluate science and apply it during WAG advice for WDFW (Day 1); receive an update from WDFW on wolf management activities and other topics (Day 1); identify the objectives for future WAG discussions around wolf and ungulate interactions and lay the foundations for future WAG advice for the post-recovery plan; create a shared understanding of the various entities involved in Washington wolf management (Day 1); review, revise, and confirm proposed WAG ground rules (Day 1).

**Comment**

After Public Comment, we will do our final WAG and WDFW reflections and adjourn at noon. Are there any questions, concerns, or anything else to add to the agenda?

**Comment**

I just wanted to reach out to the public and say thank you. We know you are listening. People reached out about fladry and said it is ready for us to use, so I just wanted to thank people for that.

**Comment**

Thank you for that. I am glad you said that out loud. Are there any other comments, thoughts, or other introductory things before we move into framing the wolf-ungulate interaction discussion?

**No comments**

**Comment**

This morning I emailed our ground rules adopted yesterday as a PDF. We talked in our

session this morning that there were a couple ground rules pushed pretty hard yesterday. We really want to attend to “assuming good intent” and “acknowledge when things get heated.” We bumped into those yesterday. These are tough topics so I will do my best to give gentle reminders if it appears we are behaving contrary to those group agreements. Thank you very much for keeping each other and yourselves accountable. Let’s go ahead and get started.

I will move us over to the Mural board. We are not sending members of the public this link because we are really looking for input from WDFW and WAG members. However, we want you to be able to see what we are doing so we will screen share. Before I start to screen share, I just want to check in. Are you all able to access the board? Is anyone having any difficulties?

### **No comments**

#### Comment

There are some parts of this exercise that I have pre-populated from our November meeting and some that will be new. I will try not to be my usual linear self, but there is a bit of a sequence here. When we left off in November, you identified these things you wanted to address (Section #2 of the Mural Board). The only thing I added was “What are the research questions being addressed in the Predator-Prey study?” and we were directed to the University of Washington website. Everything else was added from input provided in November.

The other thing to look at is when we would do this, because I heard loud and clear yesterday this is a conversation many wanted for some time. I am also aware there is rulemaking that are timing challenges for WDFW, so there is going to be negotiation about the “when.”

What I would like to do is take a few minutes and get feedback onto the board about why we should even have this conversation. You are an advisory group so there is a certain expectation that the Department needs something from you. They need advice or a recommendation for a decision, action, or direction they are heading. We can imagine WDFW might say maybe they are looking for some recommendations or advice for a post-recovery plan. I don’t know but that could be something added here. For WAG, there might be reasons to have this conversation that are either connected to actions or advice you want to suggest or if it is important for you to know the whole picture of wolf management in the state. What is the purpose of WAG engaging in this conversation? That is what I would invite you to put here. Let’s focus for a minute on “why” we are talking about wolf-ungulate interactions.

### **Added under WDFW:**

- There is already guidance from the GMP (Game Management Plan) that comes into play if predators are determined to have a negative effect on an at-risk ungulate population. Does the WAG support that guidance when it comes to wolves, now and/or in post-recovery? If not, what are metrics WAG could support?
- Guidance on post-recovery wolf management and goals of management actions
- Better understand the role and effects” of wolves in the systems they are now part of again
- Gain understanding of how wolves and ungulates interact and the complexities of the biological “system”
- If wolves were determined to have a negative effect in an at-risk ungulate population and wolf removal was on the table as a partial solution, would WAG support hunting as a tool in this situation?
- Increase public confidence that (including hunters) that WDFW knows what they need to know to manage these species
- Our constituents and the public expect us to
- Have solid understanding of what we know about ungulates in WA state and the other documents that guide their management
- What are common projects WAG could spearhead to help ungulate populations in certain areas? E.g., Sponsor a prescribed burn, fence removal project, spearhead funding for disease-related projects/research
- Understand other known stressors on ungulate populations that are not related to wolves
- What do we mean by “healthy ungulate populations” – so we have measurable objectives

### **Comment**

I have a clarifying question. I would have thought one of the “whys” for WDFW would be they want hunting to be viable. I would have thought that would be an important “why” as hunters support WDFW. I put that in the WAG section, but I am surprised it is not in this WDFW section. But am I missing the objectives of the organization or the objective of this particular exercise?

### **Comment**

I think it is not written here explicitly but I wrote “Guidance on post-recovery wolf management and goals of management actions.” This group is not designed to make recommendations about ungulate management, but it is about wolf management. That is what I was thinking. If hunting was being negatively impacted by wolves, this group could say what guidance or management action for wolves could be. It is wrapped up in that for me.

### **Comment**

Okay. In the stated goals in the initial wolf management plan, I thought a healthy wolf-ungulate populations was a stated goal. That and the wolf-livestock interaction reduction. Am I remembering correctly?

Comment

Yeah, you are. There are other documents that guide the management of healthy ungulate herds, so they are all tied together but a little bit separate.

Comment

I understand. I just hope the message of healthy ungulates doesn't get lost to this group. It sounds like it isn't but it is good for hunting, livestock interactions, and tourism.

Comment

Good point. I didn't write it because I thought the exercise was that we were supposed to write what guidance WDFW is looking for from WAG. We know hunting is important. There are policy decisions that will be made that will be a good reflection of guidance from the public.

Comment

Do you feel like you got what you needed there? Certainly, we can talk about what WAG wants to get out of this. Are you satisfied with that explanation?

Comment

Yeah, that all makes sense. I just worry as you communicate to the hunting public. It is almost implicit they support hunting but I could see someone reading this and saying, "Why doesn't it directly say that?" I don't have religion one way or another but I could see people saying something.

Comment

I do want to echo what was said. I did read what she has but I would like to see it expanded upon so it is a little clearer. I would like to see it framed easier for hunting to understand it could be at tool. But I know this is a sticking point for hunters when it comes to wolves and ungulate populations.

Comment

If WDFW would be okay, I could add a visible addition to this. But I don't have to put that in there.

Comment

If I understand the public, I think he means that keeping hunting viable is one of the expectations. I don't know if that is another way to cover it with an arrow like you are talking about.

Comment

I was thinking about hunters when I wrote that too. I probably should have been more explicit that it was included but he makes a really good point. I absolutely believe the Department is committed to that too.

Comment

Would I add “including hunters?” Or “hunting?”

Comment

You could but I would put it up by the “increase public confidence (including hunters) that WDFW knows what they need to know to manage these species.”

Comment

I think they got there. Let’s not endanger another species to help another endangered species. I don’t think that gains anything.

Comment

I am still confused. I thought the list would be guidance we are looking for and guidance WAG is looking for. Again, I know hunting is important, but that is not guidance that WDFW is looking for. We are looking for guidance on specific questions. I might be confused about the exercise.

Comment

I think you might be narrowing it beyond what it needs to be.

**Added under WAG:**

- How do we use the fact that there are multiple drivers of ungulate population dynamics to open up “common ground” avenues of action, e.g., habitat restoration projects?

I see connection with this and WDFW saying might there be opportunity for WAG to advocate for actions that do that.

Comment

I put that there. I wanted to make a follow-up comment we just had in the WDFW box. As a representative of the conservation community, I would be remiss not to point out that a general assumption that hunting wolves is necessary to maintain a surplus of ungulates so that people can hunt ungulates is going to be extraordinarily controversial amongst the public. If we can, let’s keep an open mind about different factors that affect ungulate populations and hunter satisfaction, like access and how hunting seasons are set. If we look for places where we can help support ungulate populations that are not right down the middle that will ignite controversy, to me, that is where WAG could make a really positive contribution.

There was a lot of emphasis on ungulate hunting above which is completely valid. But where it gets tricky is the point that was raised in places where there was an attempt to remove/reduce wolf populations to create surplus huntable ungulates. There is mixed results. I just wanted to point to the fact that a WAG discussion about this needs to take that broader perspective and make sure we understand things may be decreasing both healthy ungulate populations and be an issue for hunter satisfaction. It is easy to point to wolves as a negative driver. It has been for decades. It will result in conflict in the state if

one of the only viable options is seen as killing a bunch of wolves to increase ungulate population.

Comment

I agree with you on what you are saying but I do think that at some point, WAG does have to address that there are some hunters that do believe hunting wolves is a way to manage the species and keep a healthy ungulate population. I realize this is a controversial view. I don't have a desire to hunt wolves, but there are some people that think it should be an option. We will have to address it.

*Chat: I'm on my phone and can't type anything but my thoughts are we need to know how many prey there are to know how many predators an area will support. This will make livestock interactions less. Supply and demand.*

Comment

It is a very complex system. We should not get too focused on one piece of the system, in particular hunting wolves, where a number of you have commented on the controversy of that.

Comment

I appreciate that. I do love hunting but I do feel like I am first and foremost a steward of the environment and a conservationist. It is multivariable and complicated. Even in previous discussions and yesterday, the amount of hunters on WAG now we just continue to push the hunting message down and hunting is a viable way to interact with the environment and I think it is viable to be in touch with your food source. I wrote the first goal I thought one of the three goals was to have a healthy ungulate population. I want to make sure we don't lose that in the nuance of discussion.

Comment

I was not at all diminishing the importance of hunting. What I was trying to say was can we look at ways to support satisfactory ungulate hunting that don't necessarily gravitate to hunting wolves to do that, because of the controversy. There are multiple ways and we have been leading up to this discussion for years on WAG. Can hunters actually gain allies in the environmental community to solve issues of unsatisfactory hunting experiences? That is possible to opening up a vista of all the ways that lead to inadequate hunting populations. It is in the spirit of trying to find common ground to support viability of hunting.

Comment

I appreciate the common ground. I totally agree. Thank you.

Comment

You look at habitat degradation and how often that is why you see ungulate decline. Dealing with habitat is a lot more expensive than killing carnivores usually. I am interested to have that conversation with the Department, based on conversations with the

Commission and how we allocate funding.

Comment

At the risk of diving even further into a controversial topic, I wrote the questions about the Game Management Plan and WAG supporting hunting as a tool. I feel we are getting ahead of ourselves. I don't mean to have a wolf hunting conversation. I am just teeing up some of the questions that have already been teed up in the alternatives matrix that we shared with you recently. That is not saying, "Do you support wolf hunting?" It is saying, "We already have a Game Management Plan and it already has guidelines about predator management based on status of at-risk ungulate population. Wolves are already included in that guidance. Does WAG support it? Is it appropriate now? Or when wolves are recovered?" That is the guidance the Department needs because that is policy considerations, not right or wrong. Science doesn't tell us, "Yes, though shalt take this management path." We have WAG to get at those tough questions. There is guidance that says WDFW is going to conduct predator control in certain situations. *If* – not when – WDFW goes down that path, does WAG support using hunters as a tool for those actions? That is the question at hand. The answer can be no, it is just to tee up that these are the policy decisions we have to make. They are decisions of what people support, not biological considerations. And these are not to be answered today. It is just a preview.

Comment

I appreciate that. Yes, there are some pieces in the WDFW section that we will definitely want to map out when WAG would have the discussion. I know we need to spend time on questions themselves so let's look at these other ones.

**Other added WAG:**

- Stated goal of wolf management is to have a healthy ungulate population
- Healthy ungulate population may reduce livestock wolf interactions
- Healthy ungulate population keeps hunting viable in state
- Healthy ungulate population increases biodiversity
- Allows us to provide good input on post-recovery plan
- Interested to have scientific data regarding actual impact of wolves on the ungulate population vs. speculation
- Address societal assumptions that may not be correct
- Want to understand the relationships between human predators, human infrastructure, other non-human predators, and ungulate populations
- We need to know how many prey there are to know how many predators an area will support. This will make livestock interactions less. Supply and demand
- Want to understand if there are benefits to wolves helping manage rising/problematic ungulate populations, such as elk in Hamilton and Lyman
- How do we use the fact that there are multiple drivers of ungulate population dynamics to open up "common ground" avenues of action, e.g., habitat restoration projects?
- Healthy ungulate population important to Eastern WA communities

Comment

Going back, I have a question for the Department. I totally understand teeing this up but can you walk us through, similar to the chart yesterday, how does WAG truly matter in regard to hunting? We cannot help with authorizing hunting seasons, so what value is that truly?

*Chat: WAG can have discussions about these topics, but does the Dept expect a consensus recommendation, or just the sense of diversity of opinion on WAG?*

Comment

Great question. Something along same vein was just asked in the chat. Does the Department expect consensus? I don't know. At some point, folks would have said WAG could not come to consensus on lethal removal of wolves and WAG did at one point in time. Could WAG come to consensus on some of these issues? Maybe, maybe not. I don't know.

Is it for us to decide you don't want to have the conversation at all and you want the Department to make a choice without talking to WAG? There are some solutions that are common ground but tough. What are factors that influence it? Let's look at science. What are things we could meaningfully manipulate? Are some of those socially/morally acceptable? Maybe WAG comes to consensus on that stuff, but maybe we don't. From what I know about how WAG operates, it feels like WAG has a discussion about that rather than the agency making decisions. Others who have more history in the agency can maybe dive in if I am wrong about that.

Comment

Is there enough authority within the agency to make the decisions without going through the Commission as far as allowing things? You said there are things you can do, but to what extent can the agency do things?

Comment

Things like hunting seasons are determined by the Commission. If WAG, a diverse group, comes to consensus on something, then that is going to be very powerful for the Commission to consider. They are still the decisions makers, same with public avenues, but WAG consensus is powerful. It is a good question. I don't know. I do know sometimes WAG comes to consensus on tough issues and sometimes they don't. Either way, it requires discussion.

Comment

Yes, have the discussion, but expectations shape the discussion.

Comment

I understand this is a really difficult conversation for many people and a majority of people on WAG. To be fair, I have been on this group for 6 years and I have to say that I don't personally have a vested interest in some subjects. I would ask my fellow WAG members



to keep in mind we should have this discussion. I know it is difficult and it will ignite a firestorm, but I am willing to take that on. I am representing hunters officially. I really believe this is a topic at some point we need to have discussion on and I hope people can keep an open mind. There are people on my side of the isle that believe wolves should be hunted. To have this come up in this format is a very important issue to me and the hunters I represent. I am not saying that all hunters do agree with wolf hunting – I personally don't have any desire to – but I believe it is a discussion that needs to come up.

*Chat: I agree with you that we should discuss.*

#### Comment

In that spirit, you will all have an opportunity to think about how that is framed. As a facilitator, I would look for an opportunity to find that common ground. Whatever you can agree on is powerful and I encourage you to have a discussion without predetermining outcomes of what the discussion will be. We can have caution about the conversation but be willing to at least have the conversation.

To do that, what are the topics or questions that need to be addressed? I invite both WAG and WDFW staff to add to these. We did this a bit in November, and that table of topics for post-recovery planning was mentioned. These are questions in order to get to that advice or guidance that WDFW is looking for.

#### **Added under State of Knowledge:**

- How are different species of ungulates impacted by wolves (moose vs elk vs mule deer vs sheep etc.)?
- What are other states finding with wolf-ungulate interaction?
- What do we know about other predators with ungulates?
- What are the research questions being addressed in the Predator-Prey study?
- What does the current literature say about “prey switching”?
- Does a decrease in ungulates lead to more conflict with livestock?
- Less about mgt and more about interactions
- Be specific about what literature would be most impactful for WAG work
- How does disease management play into ungulate population management? (i.e., CWD, hoof disease)
- Once lethal control is determined as necessary, what other options are there besides hunters? For example, WDFW lethal control, contracting with another agency, etc.

#### **Added under Ungulate Populations:**

- What factors influence ungulate populations?
- How do these factors interact with predator/prey dynamics to further influence ungulate populations?
- What data does WDFW have on ungulates/latest ungulate harvests?
- What are the risks to smaller or isolated ungulate populations (sheep, goats, caribou)

- Where are areas where ungulate populations above nutritional carrying capacity?
- What will actually knowing the ungulate population give us?
- What is the current state of ungulate species populations and their trends?
- How much is wolf predation adding to annual mortality of ungulates?
- How does hunting impact the ungulate population?
- Other important metrics in addition to population numbers: survival, recruitment, etc.
- Discussion of the population “need to know” question

**Added under Triggers for Action:**

- Under what circumstances might wolf predation be a major concern?
- How can it be determined that wolves are having an adverse effect separate from potential other causes of a local decline?

Comment

I don't quite understand the “what will actually knowing the ungulate population give us?” I thought that was answered in the “why” section before this. I am curious to why someone is asking that.

Comment

All I will say is the question is why WAG would even talk about wolf-ungulate interactions and what the Department is looking for from a conversation about wolf-ungulate interactions. I am interpreting this question as “what would knowing that number do for being able to provide illumination to that subject?”

Comment

I am hoping whoever wrote this will help but I think they are saying we are asking all these questions, but what will actually knowing the information tell us? Going back to the fundamentals, before even asking the questions, what would that even tell us?

Comment

Ultimately, the central question is probably the trend question. We now have wolves and more of them all the time. What is that doing? Are these huntable populations going down or are conditions stable? You cannot get to the trend unless you know what each data point is. Again, I think this is a conversation about what exactly we need to know and why we need to know it. I am not sure that is assumable.

Comment

Isn't the reason why we want to know these populations because we want biodiversity and that we are doing right thing for the environment and keeping populations from being endangered. We want to make sure there is enough prey for predators and for hunting populations to keep it viable. Maybe I am looking at the exercise wrong but I thought those were the meta-answers to why it is important to have a stable ungulate population.

Comment

To me, what you are talking about is the “why” question. I am saying the trend and current state are the “what” questions. You are asking why we care about trend. It is those things you just said. The information is the state of the populations and their trends.

#### Comment

I totally agree. I am just confused by that note that says, “what will actually knowing the ungulate population give us?” I feel like we already answered that previously and we need to now figure out what the populations are.

#### Comment

It is a good discussion. I do believe that the hunting public and nonhunting public believes the Department should be able to say we have 23,457 animals in northeast Washington. The reality is we will not be able to say that. I think at the core of this note is the idea that there is a belief that the Department should have specific population estimates for all ungulate populations. In some cases, we would have a better opportunity to try to gather a population estimate, but I think that trend of how a population as a whole is performing (increased, decreased, or stable) and then monitoring whether that is harvest that comes into play.

There needs to be a specific conversation in this interest in the Department pursuing the Holy Grail of knowing what the population is. I don’t know that from the Department’s perspective and the hunting public’s perspective we will be on the same page for that need. Correct anything I screwed up but I really feel this is sort of the Holy Grail – I hope not to offend anyone with that term – that the Department has to answer those questions about a specific population of ungulates.

#### Comment

In the past, Idaho used to pump a ton of resources into mule deer surveys and get population estimates. They held meetings with deer elk managers and in one of those, a smart biometrician named Gary White presented a paper called *How many mule deer are there?* He made a case that the most useful thing to know would be survival. They remodeled their program now, which is collaring mule deer and measuring survival. That was the thing that moved around the most and was much easier to measure. I am not saying that is what we should do, but that is the conversation we need to have of “what exactly do we need to know.” I don’t know if that helps.

#### Comment

That would be a fun, good discussion to have.

#### Comment

Great questions here. I would love to connect the questions to this piece (the first chart) but that might require a smaller group coming back to WAG and mapping that out a bit. I would love WDFW and WAG members’ thoughts about that. If these are the questions (a bunch around ungulate populations, some about systems, wolf specific ones, and guidance to the Department regarding post-recovery plan), then I am wondering about the

“when.”

The next meeting is either at the end of April or the end of June based on your responses to the poll. I also heard conversations with rulemaking this spring and some concerns about availability. I am wondering about what we might be able to flag or identify to discuss at the next meeting about these topics, foundational knowledge on ungulate populations, and what are the need-to-know questions.

Comment

This thing is populated with a ton of excellent questions. They require research and looking at literature from a lot of staff that are not typically involved in WAG meetings. This is just suggestion, so ungulate scientists and researchers feel free to reject. I feel like a good starting point might be this sticky “what data does DFW have.” Maybe one of our ungulate biologists could walk through status and trend reports. Then maybe the small group or this group could pick three of these that are most important for staff to provide information so they can ask questions. This is my own perspective but I would advocate for a June meeting because we will be in the midst of Commission work in April. It gives staff more time to prepare. Please jump in, other staff, and give your ideas.

*Chat: I thought we'd be meeting in both April and June.*

Comment

I think initially we thought one or the other and it would be three meetings in the rest of the fiscal year, which ends June 30. If that is different and you want to meet in both April and June, I am certainly happy to do that. If you think that small group concept is useful then let's try to identify what that looks like.

Comment

I thought that was a great suggestion. To me, I think the two most interesting things are the current state and trends we know, and the other is “what does the literature say” and “what are other states doing” to get a background. I am fine with June. It would be great if a small group could meet more often or prior to that.

Comment

I think a small group would need to meet more often and before then.

Comment

You said, “what does the literature say” or “other states’ literature,” but I am like “about what specifically?” Each scientific paper addresses a specific research question.

Comment

I guess what literature out there is most impactful to what we are doing. I am not sure I know what the answer is. It could be from one angle like, “What does the literature say about biodiversity and compensation versus additive?” Another path to take would be where we understand how wolves interact with what another state has done with wolves

and ungulates so we have an idea of how the populations might fluctuate. I don't have a specific response other than the best information to get the easiest. The mule deer study that was brought up was fascinating.

Comment

Maybe the first task is to suss out a small group. Being very intentional about the information you are searching for and how it addresses the questions that are important to you and the process.

Comment

Sorry but we are all over the place right now. We are talking about a small group, then the next meeting... Can you focus this to where we are at? I would love to have input on the next meeting but we are really bouncing.

Comment

The next conversation is these are the topics we would identify for the next meeting. But what we are doing in the "when" is trying to identify if this is something for a next meeting. Is this something for further out conversation? That is why there is overlap going, but I get that it feels convoluted. The notion of having a small group is in response to how this conversation is going. Does that help? Is it hard to follow? Okay, I hear you.

Comment

That is also what I was going to address.

Comment

Yeah, sometimes when being responsive to what you are saying I get out of my linear mode. If we can identify what you want to do for the next meeting and if it is trying to focus on fundamental questions, is the way to do that to try to have this conversation as a group in April or June? Or would you be amenable to a small group trying to get that put together so you could actually get the information at the next meeting instead of just trying to frame it up again? If these two topics that are starred seem like a good first step in wolf-ungulate interaction, is a small group a mechanism to get there?

Comment

I think we absolutely need to know the data the Department does have. It was mentioned yesterday that they do have counts and data. It feels out of our lane, but I think it would help everyone knowing what data is already there. Like it was said, if you are going to be doing research, we are years away from results. As far as other states, our state has not followed other states on anything so I don't know if that is worth our time.

Comment

I am going to jump on that bandwagon. It seems like we spend a lot of time on ungulates, which is very interesting, but we are losing track of where WAG should be going. I am not good with the Mural board but I want to throw out questions: I have questions from the last year and a half. How many wolves are enough? What would be a comfortable population

that people could control? We never get into discussion on areas. Some areas will not support wolf populations. What is unlisted? We need to plan now before it happens. When do we start managing wolves? Planning needs to start now. To me, this is what WAG should be doing instead of diving into ungulates. It was said earlier we are supposed to be giving advice on wolves, so I want to go back into broad policy areas.

*Chat: Great Questions!*

Comment

This is a very interesting conversation. There are definitely divergent opinions on WAG. Some say this is important conversation while others find it hard to connect how this conversation connects to the WAG mission. We tried to discern that a bit in the exercise but would love to work with a smaller group of people. I would love to get your list of questions for further discussion.

Comment

I heard someone say that Washington hasn't done things the way other states do them, so why look at other states' literature? My understanding is more about what the predator/prey relationships are in other states with wolf populations, not management. Once wolves are recolonized, or if they never left (like in Michigan), how have dynamics changed with wolves over time? To me, that is a relevant reason to look at literature from other places that have interactions between wolves and ungulates. That peaked my attention when I heard because I don't think it is about management, I think it is about interactions.

To the question of why we are delving into the ungulate topic: In respect to the hunters waiting to have this discussion, I think we should have it. But I do think if we don't have good understanding of what good ungulate population dynamics are and what affects them, it will be hard for us to answer some questions that were asked. For example, what are the purposes of managing a wolf population and the effect of wolves on ungulate populations? If we don't understand that, we don't have a basis on recommendations on what a post-delisting plan looks like.

I also think there are a lot of assumptions all over the board about what those interactions are. By us having a discussion in public that tries to get us to a common understanding of what is in the literature then when the Predator-Prey Project study comes out, I think the quality will improve. I think it is good for our functioning if we find things that may not be a complete answer but WAG can work together.

Back to the fundamentals, I don't think the purpose of what we are doing is to make management recommendations on ungulates by themselves, but I think it really informs basis on discussion about a post-delisting plan. There is language in the current wolf management plan about taking actions on wolf populations if there is a certain amount of change in ungulate populations. That is already in the plan so having clarity on basic science and on what the Department knows and doesn't know really provides us a strong

foundation on providing good advice on questions relevant to a post-delisting management plan.

#### Comment

I echo a lot of what was said. I feel like we have this objective to support viable hunting and that community has been underserved, frankly. More importantly, it is hard to manage a single species. You have to look at how these species interact. One big interaction of wolf species is the prey population. It will be complex but of primary importance.

I want to follow up with this idea of common ground. Most of us are here to be a steward of the environment so we can find areas of common ground that will push us forward. Ungulates are good for a lot of people (producers, wolves, hunters, etc.) I have been pushing for this and I think it has been underserved. I understand some may not agree with that but it feels to me you can make a compelling argument to look at this.

#### Comment

Thanks to both of you for what you said. I think this is an important discussion. When we as wolf managers think about what the big issues are that create issues in coexistence with wolves. Some people think wolf-livestock conflict and wolf-human conflict. Another big one is how wolves and ungulates interact. Those are the big three. WAG has spent years and years on wolf-livestock conflict. I think WAG has given us excellent guidance on how to deal with that. I am ready to move on from that conversation. All these discussions are all about post-recovery wolf management. We manage wolves annually. We kill wolves every year for livestock conflict, so to say wolves aren't being managed is not true.

Wolves are an endangered species. There is specific criteria for that. The impetus behind the University of Washington wolf model that I mention in every meeting is to give us an idea of what is happening with the wolf population. We don't evaluate what a good wolf population number is. We evaluate if this looks like a population that will not go away anytime soon or if it is fragile to things like diseases. Working on whether wolves inform their current listing status is underway. It is happening.

We get asked this all the time: Wolves will not be hunted unless their listing status changes. Okay? Wolves are an endangered species right now, so this conversation about wolf-ungulate interactions is big about coexisting with wolves and balancing competing interests. It ties in post-recovery interests and I think it is important to have. I hope maybe that helped with questions about why we are not diving into post-recovery stuff right now.

#### Comment

I am not putting this down. I have been an advocate about going into ungulate conversation. My take from yesterday was this is a complicating thing. It is not just wolves and not just hunters. There is so much in the ungulate population. I have been on my property for 40 years and my deer are the lowest I have ever seen. There is a monster population of bears and cougars, so there are a lot of other factors. I don't think wolves have an effect whatsoever on my deer. It is complicated. I think we are diving into

ungulates a little too much and I don't want to lose the bigger picture.

Comment

I believe the plan also calls for three packs in three recovery regions, so we do have something when delisting will be considered laid out. It has been spelled out into the plan, but not asking WAG guidance on that.

Comment

Yeah, not asking WAG guidance on that. It is in the wolf plan. But a policy after wolves are de-listed? You bet. That is what a lot of this gets at today.

Comment

I would really like to give a chance to take a break before deciding on the next meeting. We may have to go to Public Comment when it is posted on the agenda or at least have it overlap. Let's take a 10-minute break, then I can make a quick proposal for you to consider, then Public Comment, then see if we can confirm we do some formulating of this topic offline if we don't have a meeting for a while.

## **Break**

Comment

I first would love to land on the date(s). I received a message that we might have been a bit confusing in our poll that we were doing both April and June. We could certainly hold both dates just in case, but it would be nice for a date to aim them for. The other thing is I would like to nail whether or not you want to convene a task group to frame up the wolf-ungulate piece. April 26 and 27, and June 22 and 23 were the best dates. I was looking largely at WAG members and core WDFW staff that attend these meetings, knowing there are others that participate as well. We don't have any dates that everyone can make everything.

It makes me nervous to go almost 6 months before we meet again, even though I know we are busy with rulemaking and work to do before then. I would love to have you think about those and if it would be useful to serve on a wolf-ungulate task group. We will take Public Comment and address those after. We have seven people commenting as of now.



## Public Comment

- Don Fast, southeast Washington hunter:
  - Over here in southeast Washington, I always heard that the native wolves of Washington here were lot smaller than other ones. I have heard from hunters – most don't like the wolves – talking about how wolves have come down from Canada and are way bigger than native ones that used to be here. Sometimes they will go out just to be killing and not even use it to feed the pack. I am wondering if there is any truth to that.
  - Like it was said, I know a lot of people who have trail cams and say the cougar population seems to be big. We think that has got to be hurting mostly deer. Whatever the reason is, the deer and elk populations have been going down for multiple reasons.
  - Thank you, guys, for your meeting. It is really good just being open to different conversation and not a one-pointed meeting. One more little thing, if you guys could send me something that was about needing range riders. I would like to see information on what that is. I might be interested. I have been retired for a couple years now. Thank you.
  
- Rachel Bjork:
  - It was a really interesting discussion today and I appreciate everyone.
  - Regarding the discussion of using hunting wolves to have healthy ungulate populations, is WAG also going to consider non-native livestock that wolves compete with? If WAG is serious about tools in the toolbox, WAG must take livestock into account. I am not sure why there is nothing about non-native livestock being discussed. Environmental degradation is a big reason for decline in ungulate populations. If WAG and the Department are going to discuss using a wolf hunt, I ask they also discuss reducing non-native livestock operations. We see how other states have detrimental impact, particularly with bison and wolves, so I would hate to see if we don't focus on environmental impacts.
  
- David Linn:
  - Thanks Rachel, that was a lot of my thinking also.
  - On the whiteboard, some comments seem to focus on a “healthy ungulate population” and I am not sure that is the right question. I think it should ask what a healthy *ecosystem* is. If you have that, then healthy ungulates follow.
  - What does it mean to have a healthy ungulate population? Does it mean healthy ungulates? Which I think it does. Or does it mean a large population where not all are healthy? If you look at carnivores, they tend to take out less healthy ungulates. Wolves and other carnivores are not sole variables.
  - Cattle grazing and human hunting affects also need to be looked at with ungulate population effect. Humans are not smart enough to play God and say how many of what species should exist. For decades we have done that and the results are not very good. Humans try to solve problems but end up

- creating other problems. It leads to problem-solution, problem-solution, and never gets back to what the real problem is and how we coexist with nature.
- Yesterday someone commented on nature not being balanced and not accurate. Again, it is not nature being in balance, it is a dynamic balance that does need to ebb and flow with prey and predator.
  - Somebody said today that hunting is underserved. I have a hard time getting my mind around that. A number of the Commission see the sole function as hunting. I think the Department is too aggressive with wildlife killing. We need to focus on a healthy ecosystem including all species as part of that.
- Zoe Hanley, northwest representative of Defenders of Wildlife:
    - I missed the November meeting so I wanted to welcome Ross Facilitation. I have been pleased with the facilitation so far.
    - I want to add to comments that other folks made about how to frame this conversation about wolf-ungulate interactions. I would recommend the group start with remembering wolves are a native species returning to the state who evolved with ungulates in a robust relationship, where other predators strengthened population genetics because the strongest survive. That arm race between prey and predator continues today and it happens across populations throughout the world.
    - I get leery about wolf-ungulate populations because it usually starts with what impacts wolves have on ungulates. This implies that wolves are a stressor instead of asking in a holistic context how the dynamics between predators, prey, and humans shift and accommodate this predator returning to the landscape. I urge you to focus on larger ecosystem processes that are influenced by predators, ungulates, and humans at a holistic scale rather than looking at wolves as a stressor as so much research has.
  - Susan Kane-Ron of the Wildlife Committee, Sierra Club
    - We have 100,000 members in Washington and the Sierra Club is not anti-hunting. I appreciate the hunter who did speak earlier because he brought up an important reference which was the perceptions that people make about their observations. For instance, “There are more cougars or less ungulate because of *that*.”
    - I was hiking and met a hunter who told me about the moose numbers in Idaho being lower because of wolves. I read research that commented about the studies going on and that there are Lyme disease, ticks, climate change, and other things. Any moose can have 70,000 ticks on them. The perception is important. It is really hard to change our perception. You need to consider this when we talk about the fact that wolves are lowering the ungulate population, the psychological aspect of stating things we don’t know to be fact is really of concern.
    - The second thing I have heard about ungulate numbers is wildlife connectivity. In the Winthrop area, about 350 mule deer are killed a year. I think we need to look at ungulate numbers as related to wildlife connectivity.

It is expensive but needed. When we look at ungulate numbers in populations, we need to consider how many are killed on roadways and how many roadways are in migratory areas for forage and shelter. I don't think that when you look at numbers you are including that issue right now.

- A:
  - Thanks everyone in WAG for the productive environment. I agree with concerns that conversation around wolves and delisting connects to potential for hunting. This follows the track that other states have gone down. I can tell you people in WI and MO have strong feelings toward the torture of these animals. I am hoping Washington won't go down this path.
  - We had scientific studies yesterday that would be useful in these conversations. Some are around Canada where things don't work, and Montana also extended shoulder seasons because of an increase in elk yet they say there are too many wolves. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is to blame for mismanagement in some states because of a lack of national recovery plan. I am fifth generation Washingtonian and watched sealions being persecuted, trout being engendered, etc. Is it the fault of sea lions?
  - I am hoping we look past band aid solutions and take the idea of a hunt off the table. It will be social conflict, but cattle operations can be problematic. I point to tule elk in California. Thank you.
- Judith Atkins of western Washington:
  - I appreciate the conversation today. I have heard you talking about what is in agreement. The need for ungulates and biodiversity seems to be the right thing for the environment, and everyone is interested in that balance.
  - I have not heard why there is a need to hunt wolves. I think that is a question that I would have of the hunters. We are hearing a lot of comments about what other factors are hurting the ungulate population and it seems like wolves satisfy a desire of people to hunt. For post-recovery, what is the rationale versus the justification for hunting wolves? I think that is part of the conversation that needs to happen.

## **End of Public Comment**

*Chat: CNW has been advocating for \$18 million in the next state transportation budget for wildlife underpasses for deer on US 97.*

### **Comment**

We left WDFW and WAG staff with a question about the next meeting date. One date we have on the table is April 26 and 27. The 27<sup>th</sup> is the date of the NCI and WAG event which several of you are involved in. The event is in the evening. I have felt these WAG meetings have been pressed for time but if we imagined a full day on the first day and then a half day, it is a question of those of you participating in the event feeling it would be too long a

day to handle. Does anyone have thoughts of the April 27 overlap?

Comment

I am in the event and I don't have a problem overlapping. That is actually a better flow for me. Personally, I would be more up to speed on the latest and can jump from one to another.

Comment

Personally, my 27<sup>th</sup> daytime is jammed up but I can try to do what I can do. I don't have a problem going late though.

Comment

Yeah, that is fine. It doesn't matter to me. If we have a meeting we might as well have two meetings.

*Chat: Before and in April, WDFW staff will have on their plates: wolf rule public process, conflict mitigation plan(s), getting the ungulate team/research prepared, Periodic Status Review. Oh, and WAG recruitment :)*

Comment

If April does have discussion around the wolf-ungulate topic, part of the question is whether or not other staff could be assisting some folks not actively involved in the wolf side of things. I am wondering if that still might work for April. Again, this is a long time between meetings but it gives the ability for DFW staff to support an April meeting knowing it is a little unclear still about research.

Comment

Like it was said, we need to talk to some people who don't normally come to WAG, other Department staff in the Game Division. It is difficult to commit other staff to doing something, but I think we could probably pull something off.

Comment

I think the discussion of wolf-ungulate interactions is the most critical discussion we can have about wolves. The sooner, the better. I would advocate for April. We have district biologists and ungulate specialists so I would hope we could find someone to come.

Comment

I think it is far enough out to be able to move things around for folks and shouldn't be too big a problem.

Comment

I get the Doodle poll leading people to think we were proposing both an April and June meeting. I would really hate to see us go clear to June, which 100% of cattle will be on range. If there is any pre-turnout conversations to be had, we need the next meeting to also discuss Special Focus Areas (SFAs). We already reviewed it this year but do we need

to revisit that? We get caught up in one subject and forget the big picture.

Comment

I was struck by the list of things on staffs' plate in April but I heard other staff say the April meeting is important to have. I can make it but I am just empathizing with the weight of other activities that staff have to do right now. Could having the meeting in March or May help? I agree that not waiting until June is a good idea but is there something to alleviate the traffic jam for Department staff? If we don't want to go down that road, that is fine.

Comment

Thanks for that. I am talking with staff offline. If they can help with the ungulate topic, which they are committed to do, then it won't be all 100% the wolf rule, PSR, etc. As long as we spread the love, April is fine. As a note, a lot of things will be underway. WAG might be expecting definitive things but a lot of those things will be in flux then. I just want to put out the precursors so I might just say "Yep, it is in front of the Commission right now."

Comment

You are speaking about providing definitive updates?

Comment

Yes, and SFAs were mentioned. SFAs are not a thing. WAG never came to consensus. It is not part of the protocol. Conflict mitigations *might* be in place but, again, that is in flux. Staff are going to work on conflict mitigation plans but that is a thing where we are revisiting the same wolf-livestock topics every year. We won't have a conclusion on what the wolf rulemaking says at that time. If April is focused on wolf-ungulate, that makes perfect sense. Other things, there will be questions and that leaves frustration when we don't have results for WAG.

Comment

I am a little confused where we left SFAs if there is no such thing as an SFA. We spent a lot of time on that and I am pretty sure we gave good recommendation. We got a report on it in the last meeting. What happened? Am I the only one that thought that SFAs are a thing?

Comment

WAG did years of work on this and could never come to consensus. We couldn't put it in the protocol, because of that. We did put it as pilot and will continue it as a pilot this year. WDFW thought some language was useful and used it but officially, on the books right now, there is no SFAs in the protocol and it is not a rule yet. Staff will use the conflict mitigation plan but there was never any WAG consensus signing off on this. WDFW used the SFA discussions in some of the thinking to guide rulemaking.

Comment

Am I the only one that thinks we need to revisit that? I wasn't aware.

Comment

My question was whether or not we still have the pilot project going so I am glad to hear that is still being implemented. I would be in favor of finalizing language at some point, both in the big group and the sub group and if you think rulemaking is going to create the same outcome. Is that what you were saying?

Comment

It is hard to answer because I know what we as an agency are proposing, but I don't know whether the final answer will mirror what WAG put together or not. The public has seen the proposed language. It mirrors what WAG came with, but it is frustrating for me. We spent years on this. The Department pushed and pushed, asking if we can get somewhere and wrap this up and WAG did not come to consensus. We can look at the notes. I am not making this up. We didn't come to consensus on Section 9. We said let's try this out as a pilot. We did that and will continue it as a pilot, but it is in the rulemaking process now. I even brought it up last meeting if WAG wanted to come to some sort of position statement on the rule, so I am confused now. WAG returning to Section 9 no longer makes sense to me with the rulemaking process underway.

*Chat: I think that if the department is going to continue the pilot that is great. If WDFW wants our input on implementation of their pilot, that is a reason to discuss. However, we should discuss how to ensure that range riders will be available in the Blues next year.*

*Chat: I agree about range riders. That's a huge issue that we need help with.*

Comment

To make sure there is no blame shifting here just in case it feels that way, what I am hearing is there is a pilot SFA process is ongoing. There are some suggestions that a conversation in April might be around that, and also some comments of seeing what happens with the rule since process is underway. There is opportunity to frame up a topic in a productive way for everyone. If that sounds good, we can add that to the potential April meeting. I will suggest April is the date that we will get on your calendar. Do you also want us to hold June as a potential?

Comment

To me, it makes sense to have an April meeting focused on ungulates and let rulemaking do what it needs to do and then have a June meeting to unpack what happened with that. If there is other input related to SFAs, we can do that in June but not mix them in April.

Comment

If the Department wants to share how they are handling it, but I don't think they are looking for guidance there.

Comment

I hear your distinction that information is one thing but not getting into a discussion about developing recommendations... Got it.

April is solid and we will send out a calendar hold. If the Department says they won't be able to, we will let you know. We will hold June as strongly tentative for a next meeting. I know a number of you cannot partake in a June meeting but we tried to maximize for the largest number of WAG members and core WDFW folks. We will hold those dates.

Would there be interest in having a task group work on the wolf-ungulate topic? Does anyone object to having a wolf-ungulate task group?

Comment

WAG can do it that way if they want to. But as a wolf biologist, I do think wolf-ungulate interactions are at the core of everything to do with wolf management. I think retargeting that to a task group risks the bigger point. I think it is a discussion WAG should have together.

Comment

I am absolutely not intending this to be a task group to develop recommendations and bring them back. They are just framing the questions, getting material into the right place, and seeing which information to bring forward first. But not to deliberate outside of WAG.

*Chat: What I hear is we are just giving up giving guidance on wolf livestock interactions.*

*Chat: I think it is that WDFW is asking for guidance on a different topic. After having spent 2013 to now solely on wolf-livestock conflict.*

*Chat: That can't wait until April to happen.*

Comment

You just characterized the task group how I thought about it as well. I would volunteer to be on that. I spent time on the literature of that topic so I would like to help there.

I wanted to note comments in the chat. I do think the wolf-livestock interaction topic important to talk about in April is figuring out how to ensure there are range riders willing to do work in the Blue Mountains. That has been an unsolvable gap and directly relates to the following season. It is not about the protocol so I don't think it will have us dive into endless discussions. But it is solving that problem of ranchers being left high and dry when they want to be proactive in terms of nonlethal deterrents.

Comment

Does anybody object to a task group so the April discussion is framed up?

Comment

I'd offer to help, but if we would just be in the way, I respect that opinion too.

Comment

I am willing to see what the task group comes up with and wants to talk about. I just thought it was a group to go away and talk about it and bring it back to WAG. That terrified me.

Comment

Okay, so I think we are okay. For everything you ever do with me, we can try it and if it doesn't work, then we stop doing it and do something else. We are never locked into anything. Two have expressed interest. Is there anyone else for the small group?

Comment

Yes.

Comment

Okay. If you are interested, ponder that, and let me know.

Comment

I would say WAG is public. For the task group, I view that as around framing and not public.

Comment

I agree. WAG always had subgroups to do work on their own. I think that is perfect. WAG members are allowed to and encouraged to meet outside of WAG meetings.

*Chat: Work on the SE WA range rider topic should definitely start before April.*

*Chat: You can provide comment during the Commission process.*

*Chat: Yes, thank you. The language and Small Business Economic Impact Statement and EIS all come out next month, you can review them and provide comment. And I encourage you all to attend the Commission briefing and public hearing (currently scheduled on April 8) to have your voice heard. Draft proposed language is public now and you can check it out if you haven't already.*

Comment

We have a plan for dates, topics, and a task group. I appreciate all that very much. We will communicate with you regularly so you feel you come to these meetings and participate in the framing of them. With that, let's close out and share reflections.

**Meeting Adjourned**