

Wolf Advisory Group
Lacey Community Center
20 March 2014
Minutes

Member Introductions:

In attendance – Ray Campbell, Tom Davis, Jack Field, Dave Dashiell, Derrick Knowles, Dan Paul, Mark Pidgeon, Linda Saunders, Rebecca Wolfe, Dave Duncan, Diane Gallegos; Staff: Dave Ware, Nate Pamplin, Donny Martorello, Stephanie Simek, John Pierce, Ben Maletzke; Guest Speaker: Lorna Smith (Exec. Dir. of Western Wildlife Outreach)

WCA member requested time for discussion on post-delisting management.

Presentation: Summary Update on Wolf Conservation and Management.

Donny presented current status of wolf captures, monitoring, packs and breeding pairs. A statement was made and agreed to that wolves have been observed outside of pack polygons.

Question: Does WDFW expect to move to using packs vs. breeding pairs for delisting? Discussion on shifting metric used to measure recovery; determined it will likely shift after recovery is met. At this point, WDFW will follow metrics (breeding pairs) in plan. At a later date, methods such as patch occupancy may be used. WDFW will not be able to sustain the current level of monitoring as the wolf population continues to recover and expand.

***Request was made to list the last date packs were sighted on the Pack Status Summary table.**

Discussion on Ruby Creek female: why didn't WDFW euthanize the wolf? What value does this spayed female have to recovery? Resulting action was determined as the best option.

Discussion again on Pack vs. Pair...these two females in Ruby are considered a "pack."

Discussion occurred on the decision to not remove the wolf. WCP, Quad County and Hunters Heritage all expressed concerns regarding the action taken by WDFW.

***Work assignment: WAG was directed to develop and discuss step by step actions to provide WDFW with options on how to address scenarios such as the Ruby scenario, as well as others anticipated in the future. Need to address how to handle documented occurrence of female wolves that breed with domestic dogs.**

Question: Should we re-define pack and pair?

Discussion pointed out that we are "too far down the road to change definition of Pack or Pair." Spaying the Ruby Creek female keeps the pack active and it is expected that this team (2 females) will eventually pair up with a male wolf.

Stephanie discussed wolf conflict issues in 2013. Discussion took place regarding recent wolf depredation investigation. Discussion occurred on cougar conflict in Okanogan and whether it is related to wolf population? There was discussion on threats from wolves to public safety.

Question: Will non-WDFW employees be able to make a determination on the outcome of depredation investigations? No. WDFW strongly encourages county sheriff departments to participate and assist WDFW staff at the depredation investigation scene. WDFW will remain the lead entity on each investigation. Okanogan County requests its investigation specialist be part of the response team. There was discussion about getting the Okanogan County investigation specialist to the upcoming WDFW investigation training.

***Request to send dates of upcoming depredation investigation trainings to WAG.**

Item #1: Flow Chart for WDFW Wolf Depredation Response

The Department is proposing a change to the flow chart from the one discussed at the December meeting. After additional discussion and review, WDFW realized that the chart begins with the assumption that proactive measures are in place prior to the first depredation. In most cases that is probably not accurate.

The proposed change to the flow chart starts with a depredation, and assumes that proactive measures would be employed to prevent further depredations after that. If additional depredations occurred, an escalation of preventative measures would be employed. If the preventative measures were still not successful, then lethal action would be considered. The result is that the flow chart makes it clear that in most cases, it will take three or four incidents before lethal removal would be considered. Exceptions would be where there has been a history of depredations over many months and preventative measures have already been employed by affected livestock owners.

Question: Why was the box removed that contained the 6 lines that outlined the prevention measures? There was discussion on the need to retain the box in the checklist. Box 2 was intended to provide that same information in a summary form.

***Decision to restore the 6 line box in its entirety to the chart.**

Discussion occurred that the checklist is used to identify measures that are feasible on the producer's property.

Question: Are the confirmed depredations per owner or per pack? Per pack...based on geographic area as defined in plan.

***Increase the size of the asterisk regarding exceptions to the flow chart so that it is more visible.**

Question: What is the decision-making process regarding the "are depredations expected to continue?" If after three or four depredations in a four month period and non-lethal measures are not working, there is an expectation that depredations are likely to continue.

Question: If wolves have been removed in past years, how do you know if these are the same wolves removed in the past? There would be some judgment required here, because so much

would depend on the scenario, but some of that judgment would depend on length of time between wolf sightings, activity, or depredations.

Question: Is there flexibility to make a living document? This is a living document.

***Conduct an annual review by the WAG to the protocol document as well as other wolf management events and activities.**

Provide examples of where two wolf depredations could trigger a removal. The wedge area is probably the only example right now where we have had chronic depredation issues over multiple years.

***Add roles and responsibilities of who makes the decision on who determines what actions are necessary.** WDFW will make the decision consistent with the Wolf Plan and the protocol document.

***Chronic is year after year repeated depredations. Include this in the protocol text.**

Item #1: Draft WACs

***Assignment to review draft of WACs and provide edits to Dave. Request made to WDFW: define “clearly.”**

Discussion on why “human-safety” is included in the WACs if we know encounters are rare. Suggestion made to remove the “human” segment and leave it as “safety” within the text of the WACs.

Discussion on how delisting is addressed in the WACs.

Item #2: Presentation by Western Wildlife Outreach -- Wolf-Livestock Conflict Management Outreach

Lorna Smith, Executive Director of Western Wildlife Outreach (WVO), provided an update on the wolf-livestock conflict avoidance segment of WVO’s contracted outreach work with WDFW.

There was discussion regarding “science based” information, with an explanation of what “science based” information is. The information used is what was published and found in a WVO literature search. This information will be combined with credible information provided by WDFW conflict staff on field experience. Concern was expressed that there may be 2-sides or interpretations of the same science.

The primary audience for outreach right now is livestock producers; however, there are other groups that need to be targeted. Discussion is needed on what those other audiences should be. We have had discussion that the next targeted audience should be hunters. What is the plan for reaching the hunting community? Currently, WVO is using the education trailer to reach hunters. Two points of focus are 1) safety and 2) identification.

What focus is used to reach the general public and to promote WDFW and the importance of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan? The public needs to be brought up-to-date on the status of wolves and on wolf management.

There is a need to reach out to the hunting organizations; Hunter's Heritage is the largest organization in Washington and should be contacted. WDFW has worked to reach out to hunting groups by conducting meetings, webinars, etc.

There was discussion on what types of information need to be shared. One piece of information to share would be that there are prevention tools, but there will still be some conflict issues that may require removing wolves.

Item #3: Washington Wolf Population Viability Analysis

The presentation was given by John Pierce, WDFW Chief Scientist, and Dr. Ben Maletzke, WDFW Carnivore Biologist. Authors of the analysis are: Ben Maletzke, Robert Wielgus, John Pierce, Donny Martorello, and Derek Stinson.

Pierce and Maletzke presented the steps taken in the development of the population viability model and the results of testing various scenarios.

Question: In constructing the models, were existing populations taken into consideration for the models?

Response: The home range size depicts the density of wolves in an area and is based on information from neighboring states. The occupancy model takes the prey density into account for the habitat.

Question: How would the habitat model look if cattle occupancy was included rather than sheep?

Response: Cattle occupancy wouldn't make that big of a difference based on the fact that the parameter (cattle occupancy) was not a driving factor in research from other states. Models are based upon the assumptions accepted to construct the model.

Question: How many packs would the habitat support?

Response: Based on average territory size and other assumptions placed in the model, we could illustrate pack circles on a map of what is predicted to be suitable habitat. Whether that really translates to the number of wolves is debatable.

Question: How many years of data do you need to use Washington wolf demographics?

Response: We can begin with one year; however, to utilize the model to determine significance will require several years. Data is already being entered into the models, but we need additional information to determine significance. So far the model is tracking well with recovery rates in Washington.

Question: How was 30% removal decided?

Response: It was decided to choose a high removal rate to measure whether or not 15 breeding pairs was an adequate recovery level.

Question: Did you consider annual removal rate vs. a 30% rate?

Response: The “other removals” are already built into the model based on the rates of removal experienced in the northern Rocky Mtns. The 30% is above, or in addition to, the removals built into the average mortality rate within the model.

Question: Is the issue of density dependence on population growth modeled here?

Response: That analysis requires more extensive data than is available and, therefore, it has not been done in Washington.

We need to continue to monitor to ensure the assumptions remain valid and the assumptions are behaving the way we predicted. As soon as we see information that deviates from the assumptions, the model needs to be revised. If we see that wolves aren’t behaving as we have predicted, then we may need to adjust actions.

Comment: Social tolerance is not the same on the eastside as it is on the westside. The social tolerance assumption used was the level found in Idaho.

Response: A standard value was used for both eastern and western Washington. If the wolves respond differently, then we will know to adjust the model.

Question: Is there a way to look at the recovery models in relation to the prey base?

Response: We have not looked at that level of a sophisticated model, but these are the questions and the management issues that will be answered as we get more data and we will be able to add to the model.

Question: Isn’t genetic diversity a part of the population model?

Response: This is a theoretical question. Adopting this to the level of what is occurring on the landscape, the objective would be to have a number of wolves above the “fewest” the model predicts. Additionally, the physical capability of wolves to move, disperse and be wide-ranging makes the idea of physically isolating wolves to a point of impacting genetic diversity to be very unlikely.

Question: [Historically], what were the causes of wolf decline in Washington and when?

Response: Trapping and poison have been referenced as contributors to the decline.

Question: When does the model predict that there will be 15 breeding pairs and that they will be established across the regions?

Response: The “predicted” year for the first persistent pack in the south Cascades is 2015; with a 3-year confidence interval. The model predicts 2021 for when recovery objectives are reached for the state, again with confidence intervals.

Comment: Model assumptions are based on immigration existing; however, adjacent states are actively removing wolves and this should be taken into consideration. Also, the removal of individual wolves has an impact on pack dynamics.

Response: The model run assumes the worst case scenario of removal of entire packs, not individuals, so a change in pack dynamics would not influence recovery rates predicted by the model. Even with no immigration, the model predicts the recovery goal will still be met; only it will be nine years later than if the model includes immigration. Regardless of management in adjacent states, the likelihood of no immigration when you consider the behavior and dispersal capability of wolves is very low.

Item #4: Game Management Plan Discussion

Dave explained this is the third six-year plan WDFW will write. The last management plan did include wolves. A scoping survey was conducted and the survey indicates wolves are a major subject of interest. Members were requested to go through an exercise to determine which items would be important to include in the Game Management Plan regarding wolves. Several members expressed concern about the inclusion of wolves in the plan, stating it was premature. Others expressed it was necessary to include wolves. Dave requested we proceed with the exercise to discuss the items in the framework such as: What do we want people to know about wolf management after wolves are recovered?

It was discussed that we should also state items **not** to include in the plan.

Question: Does WDFW have enough information on prey base to determine impacts? The impacts of wolves on prey populations will not be easy to predict.

- **Include:** Prey base evaluation.
- **Include:** Important to state the listing status and include the consequences.
 - Concern was expressed regarding the timing of the scoping survey and that it may not be reflective of the state.
- **Include:** Timing for the EIS delisting.
 - Hunter's Heritage supports having this chapter in the plan; Wolf Haven does not support the chapter.
- **Include:** Wolf population, ecology and territoriality.
- **Include:** Post delisting classification process (when and how).
 - The Humane Society believes that listing the wolf as a game species is premature; even just including it in the plan is premature.
- **Include:** Describe the different Commission authorities to list and what tools does it provide WDFW.
 - Conservation NW commented that the process in Washington is different than the other states and we need to proceed slowly. The WCA commented that the expectation is that wolves will be managed as a game species as identified in the Wolf Plan.

- **Include:** The expectation that the change would not be rapid, even if wolves are listed as a game species.

Dave was asked to provide an explanation of the categories that the Commission has to classify species:

State endangered: wildlife designated by the Commission as seriously threatened with extinction

Protected wildlife: wildlife designated by the Commission that shall not be hunted or fished.

Game species (animal or game bird): shall not be hunted except by rule of the Commission.

Predatory birds: wild birds that may be hunted throughout the year or as authorized by the Commission. These are generally introduced species such as English sparrows, rock doves, and starlings; the list also includes crows and magpies which may be hunted during established seasons or if they are about to depredate etc.

Unclassified: these are species that are not classified by the Commission and therefore not protected.

Legislative classification: big game – does not mean they are hunted; that depends on Commission classification and regulation - Grizzly bears and Woodland Caribou are classified by the Legislature as big game, but they are also classified by the Commission as endangered and therefore not hunted.

- **Do not include:** Any insinuation that wolves will be classified as game.
- **Do not include:** Any insinuation that we would hunt wolves.
 - The CPOW stated that WDFW needs to have a plan because we will reach the point of recovery. Waiting until we get there is not where we need to go. WDFW has to have a plan to think about when we hit the 15.
- **Include:** Potential to reach delisting objectives within the timeframe of the Game Management Plan.
 - Quad County commented that a hunting season may be necessary when we reach recovery. In areas where they are becoming overpopulated, they need to be taken.
- **Include:** Area by area plan of reductions when the population has met the goal. Zone management with harvest objectives within the zones.
 - The Sierra Club strongly suggests to not include wolves as game animals. Calling wolves a game animal will strike social intolerance. The Humane Society states that it seems that based on the models 2021 is the marked date. That is the last year of the management plan. To have this discussion in 2014 is premature. Waiting allows time to gather additional information. Hunter's Heritage feels that having the wolf in the plan provides a sign to hunters that WDFW is considering the long term interest of hunters. WCA stated that we cannot afford to wait until 2021 to have the conversation. Now is the time. To expect producers to wait six

years is not appropriate. The Commission can classify under multiple categories. We have species listed as game and protected.

- **Include:** Information on wolves' natural history and ecology.
- **Do not include:** Harvest objectives, game management units, etc.
 - The Farm Bureau commented that WDFW needs to have all the tools available, even if it means including wolves in the Game Management Plan and listing wolves as a game species. Discuss the parts included in these plans for other animals (example: monitoring strategies).
- **Include:** Monitoring strategies.
 - Conservation NW commented that we are at a standstill. One side is stating they cannot support if the wolf is in the plan, and the other side is stating they cannot support if the wolf is not in the plan. Nate explained that having a plan for addressing these issues and outlining the process is important. Wolf Haven stated that having a process can occur without inclusion in the plan. Conservation NW asked for outreach efforts from the Department leadership to the conservation communities. Sierra Club emphasized that we are "advisory" and that we have given our advice to the Department. The other side has also given their advice; therefore, we have done all that we can do at this time.
- **Include:** Wolf-livestock
 - John Pierce suggests thinking about *what is not included in the plan*. Think about what you want the Department to do in the next three years for wolves. Wolf Haven again included education on natural history, self-regulating populations, etc. as things for WDFW to address. Conservation NW wants more discussions that include these items. Start the conversations for future discussion on these items. Discussion, that through the plan, WDFW could articulate the pathway and the public process for where the species may be over time and what the process may be if it was to be included as a game species. Use the example from a Midwest state (think it was MN) on how they had discussions on developing process for scenarios such as a hunting season, game species designation, but without stating support for or against the scenario. It allows the team to go through the process and work through what these may look like without having to take a side.

Next Meeting Agenda Items: (May 21, 2014 – Spokane; location TBD)

1. Management Scenarios Assigned (as directed by Nate earlier in this meeting)
2. Ideas for Game Management Plan
3. Finalization of the WAC Proposal for Codification of Plan elements
4. Scenario discussion on how to manage wolves post-delisting (example CA Model)

Open Public Comment:

- Make wolf updates and information more accessible to general public; people can't find the wildlife weekly. The updates are hard for the public to find.
- Game Management Plan discussion is too early; results on the ground are changing and the model predicts six years.

***Items indicated with an a asterisk are assignments/tasks**