

Wolf Advisory Group meeting notes

December 11, 2018

Spokane

WAG members: Molly Linville, Tom Erskine, Diane Gallegos, Andy Hover, Tim Coleman, Don Dashiell, Dave Duncan, Nick Martinez, Lisa Stone, Samee Charriere, Dan Paul

WDFW staff members: Donny Martorello, Kevin Robinette, Steve Pozzanghera, Annemarie Prince, Candace Bennett, Ben Maletzke, Trent Roussin, Matt Konkle, Rob Geddis, Matthew Trendera

Welcome, facilitator introduction, and check-in

Rob Geddis welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced himself to the Wolf Advisory Group as the interim facilitator.

Review agenda and identify changes

The group reviewed the agenda for this meeting.

WDFW updates on topics from member intakes

Department staff gave updates on a variety of topics.

Action items from last WAG meeting

- Facilitator conference call was completed
 - RFQ going out soon for a facilitator
 - February WAG meeting will have Rob again
 - WAG meeting after February will be first with new facilitator
- Post-delisting plan scoping
 - Not quite ready to roll out scoping for the development of the post-delisting plan
 - Public engagement processes for the plan are being planned
 - SEPA and post-delisting plan processes will be ready before the February meeting
- Litigation
 - Department received litigation from Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands in regard to management action in the Togo pack and the OPT pack
 - Those two cases are combined
 - Agency record has been completed
 - No court date set at this time, but March is the anticipated date
 - There is another case that is less clear at this time
 - Court cases have been an enormous workload on department staff members

WAG recruitment

- Recruitment went out for new WAG members
- WAG will need to bring on some new members

- Selection process will begin after the holidays
- WAG members will assist with this process as part of the onboarding process

Stakeholder meeting

- Department was invited to a stakeholder meeting recently
- Some WAG members were there as well
- A good discussion with a wide diversity of perspectives
- Good engagement with stakeholders in northeast Washington

2018 grazing season review

- Department did better job this year on wolf updates
- Later year than 2017 (heaviest times were August – October)
- Over 30 cattle depredations this year (injuries and mortalities)
- Over 70 depredation investigations this year
 - About half of the reports have been completed so far
 - Staff members would love input on how to streamline that process, since it can be incredibly time-consuming
 - Wolf events totaled 29
- Some additional range riders came on during the August timeline
 - Total of about 15 contract range riders
 - Funding did run out
- Rough on everyone this season
- Started last November with two depredations in what is now the Togo area
 - They carried over due to the 10-month window in the protocol
 - Depredation in May did not “count” towards the lethal removal consideration
 - Started again in August 2018
 - Togo was first to reach threshold for lethal removal consideration (August 2018)
- Depredations in OPT were heaviest in September 2018
 - Went through the end of October
- In Smackout, there was a depredation in August
 - Increased in October and continued through November
- OPT and Togo were predominantly on the federal grazing allotments
- Smackout depredations all occurred on private property
- During latter half of the summer (Aug. 3, Sept. 2, and Oct. 28), depredations occurred in the Grouse Flats pack area.
 - Federal allotments and private lands
- There were some depredations in central Washington by the Teanaway pack
- Grouse Flats and Teanaway depredations are now on the WDFW website, but the department recognizes that the delay is unacceptable
- There was another depredation a week ago on a calf in the Okanogan area
 - Not credited to a specific pack
 - The thought is that it was an individual wolf
 - This depredation occurred on department land, which is a first

- Most of the depredations that were not credited to wolves were credited to cougar
 - There were quite a few coyote depredations as well
 - Some losses that were human-caused, but the department doesn't record those
 - Sheriff's department may have a record
- A lot of other factors affect producers as well besides the depredations

Periodic Status Review

- Been discussed for over a year
- CR-101 filed in October
 - Outlined in monthly update
 - Oct. 1 started the one-year process
- Department wants to implement as much data from Washington as possible in the creation of the periodic status review
- Preliminary periodic status review will be integrated into the March annual report
- Final periodic status review will go through the entire public process
- Goal is to bring the final to the Fish and Wildlife Commission in November/December 2019
- The department encourages everyone to get involved in the process

Caught in the Act review

- Outlined in the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan
 - Outlined as a department permit
- The 2017 cases didn't quite fit the plan
 - Involved more than one pack
 - Both incidents investigated by Enforcement officers
- There is a draft summary being reviewed by internal staff members
 - The final assessment of the two caught in the act cases will be published to the website
 - The department assesses whether they were lawful and whether they affect recovery

Interagency

- In process of regrouping interagency team
 - Updating list of the agencies involved
 - WDFW will send that list to WAG members
 - If WAG feels like entities are missing, there is an opportunity to help get the word out
 - Look to early January for the list
 - Will include tribes, federal agencies, and other state agencies
- Looking at Feb. 6-8 for next interagency meeting
 - Dependent on Director's schedule as well
 - Want to provide a wolf update
 - Get more involved on how the department can collaborate with other agencies

- Looking for new DNR representative
- Working on MOU for data sharing and other components
- Want to work with this team on outreach
 - Looking into the value of adding identification cards (coyote versus wolf) in regional wildlife areas and other department lands
 - Launch of department's new website has been pushed back to first quarter 2019
- In most cases, this group will consist of decision-makers
 - This will help streamline the process
 - Not guaranteed that it will all be decision-makers

Julia Smith introduced herself as a new department staff member

- A history of wolf conservation and management experience
- No one does wolf conservation and management like Washington does it
- Here to oversee the wolf translocation process
 - SEPA
 - Potential for controversy
 - EIS to be done
 - Evaluating all pluses and minuses of wolf translocation
 - Wide range of possibilities
 - Scoping process forthcoming
 - Public get involved
 - Too soon for a number (things are preliminary right now)
 - That sort of information comes after the public scoping
- Currently in the pre-scoping process
 - Working with agency staff members and stakeholders
 - Scoping is scheduled to launch Feb. 1
 - Public comments and public meetings
 - Not detailed at this point in an effort to honor the SEPA process
 - The department wants to hear from the public first
 - Preliminary draft will be sent out to WAG
- There will be a second public process once the draft plan is available

Predator/prey project update

- Over 230 collars out
 - Looking to get more out by the end of winter
 - Wolves and cougars
- Caught almost 40 cougars
- Five active wolf collars in the study area
- Fifty-six collared elk
- Thirty collared white-tailed deer
- Mule deer have 132 collars out
- Not all collars are still active
- Probably still a year or two to go before any findings are published

- Collars are replenished on carnivores because there are so few of them
 - More ungulate collars are available, so replenishing them is not as much of a priority
- The study is designed around Huckleberry, Stranger, Carpenter Ridge, and Dirty Shirt, as well as Lookout and Loup Loup (northeast and Okanogan areas)
- Bobcats and coyotes will be collared by a separate team this winter as well
- Would like to collar all the study packs

Collaring

- Winter surveys will start soon (number of breeding pairs, packs, minimum counts)
 - Weather is a factor
- Track counts are also ongoing
 - Working with agency biologists from tribes, U.S. Forest Service, and Department of Natural Resources
- Packs with collars are easier to track
 - Go up on flights and get minimum counts
- Packs without collars must be counted differently
 - Tracks and trail cameras
- Aerial capture work is ongoing as well
 - Wanting to get at least two collars in the predator/prey study packs
 - Want to collar depredating packs as well
- Helicopter work in the winter is mostly to supplement packs that have collars already
- April is when packs without existing collars are targeted for collaring
- Annual report should be published at the end of March
 - Hoping to have genetics output at that time as well
- Definitely looking into the southeast area
 - Should be easier by next spring to trap for collaring in those pack areas
 - Can't start trapping until April at the earliest
 - Southeast will be a priority area in the spring
- Two collars in Carpenter Ridge, one in Dirty Shirt, and one in Stranger
 - Would like to get one in Huckleberry
- Loup Loup has a collar, but not Lookout yet due to fires
- How do you determine whether it's a single wolf or an existing pack?
 - The department generally knows where packs tend to hang, and when an event occurs far away from those areas, and there is evidence of a single wolf in that event area, that determination can be made
 - We can never be 100 percent sure, but using the data we have, we can make a determination with some confidence
 - The depredations still count, just not against a known pack
 - It counts toward that individual

Data sharing

- Data sharing is being discussed to both protect wolves and give producers the information they need to protect livestock
- Want to make this program more robust so it lasts long term
 - Simplify agreements and have the language in there so folks know how important it is to secure that data
- Looked at changing agreement forms and adjusting the blackout period
 - Blackout period should actually be April 1 – July 15
 - Blacked out to producers
 - County commissioners and sheriffs have that data and can work with producers
 - Department staff also continuing to work with producers during that blackout time
- Different presentation that shows areas of high and heavy use
 - Hot spots on the map, surrounded by lighter areas that show less use
 - Concern from stakeholders that this wouldn't provide the information they needed
 - Wanted point data
 - Transitioned to a learning period to outline hot spot data and integrate with the point data
- Data was shared through the rest of the 2018 grazing season
 - Commission elected to keep data sharing the same for 2018
- Agreement still being worked on (language being added)
- Producer agreement is in good shape
- County commissioner agreement still under review
- A lot of lessons learned during this data sharing process
 - Was not full engagement with the broad WAG group in regard to the rollout of the new presentation
 - Specific engagement was done, but not on a statewide level
 - Proposed rollout was less than ideal
- Department recognizes the importance of the data sharing program for producers, county commissioners, and WAG
- Department moved to a modified display of the data for 2018
 - Coincided with the new WDFW Director starting
- Meeting with stakeholders where data sharing was discussed again
 - Some areas flagged for additional conversation
 - Blackout dates
 - Broader opportunity for engagement
 - WAG representation
 - Department staff members
 - Less discussion on the actual presentation of that data
 - Diverse subgroup asked to look at data sharing and dig into those flagged areas
 - Department would still like to move forward with an improved data sharing process for 2019

- Update by Feb. 1
- Goal is a program that is durable and that can withstand scrutiny
 - Also want a program that can be utilized to help wolf recovery

Comment

The data sharing was very poorly handled by the department and created a lot of distrust among producers. The dens are the most important thing for the producers to know so they can stay away from them.

Question

Are all producers who have cattle that may come in contact with a den site told verbally or just producers with agreements?

Answer

That is every producer and that does not require having a contract. The department looks at the maps each year and determines who needs to know. Sometimes there are new names and the department has to seek them out and talk to them.

Comment

On the outside, it sounds like the department is blacking out the den sites and then telling producers not to go near den sites. If you're telling them about den site locations verbally, that information needs to get out.

Answer

It's also fair to say that the perception, and in some cases reality, there is a feeling that we haven't met that expectation.

Comment

One thing we need to remember as a group is that ultimately we are an advisory group, and the department and commission can take our input and make decisions.

Comment

Maybe the way to address the problem is to go to the administrators. The U.S. Forest Service knows where the allotments are broken down, and maybe they can tell producers which pastures they should use.

Comment

That would get in the way of the agreement contracts. USFS provides expectations. It sounds great, but it may not be easy.

Comment

Agreed, but we need to think about how we adapt and how we can help.

Question

What data will be available for 2019?

Answer

I think where we are is that there is a specific request that the subgroup dive into this issue. There is a proposal to start with where we left in 2018, then the subgroup works on the 2019 approach. That is consistent with the direction we received from the commission and the Director. The subgroup is made up of a diverse group of folks, including producers, WAG members, environmentalists, and department staff members.

Question

Did you see any increase in comfort with the density (KDE) data?

Answer

We actually received more comments on the functionality of the system in general. It was about equal across the board on what people like. It needs to be more mobile friendly.

Ungulate projects

- Sightability model for mule deer using predator/prey collars
- There are plans to capture mule deer in the Blue Mountains in February
 - Lower elevation and not exactly in the same area as wolf packs
- These are long term projects that will develop a survey technique to monitor mule deer
- In the northeast, there are still 12 moose collars
 - Study is in its fifth year
 - Monitoring calf survivability for one more year

Review of the 2018 grazing season

The group discussed the 2018 grazing season in three parts.

Issues to discuss

- Risk as it relates to grazing (risk of predation)
- Expectations for the producers
 - Quantity and quality
- Communication specific to decision making
 - Producers, department, WAG members
- Future expectations of all parties
- Discussion of dissenting opinions regarding OPT
- Cause and effect in general
- Effectiveness of lethal and nonlethal for 2018
- Effectiveness of depredation investigations
- Discuss rumors

Where to focus first

- Discussion of dissenting opinions regarding OPT

Ideas to explore

The group elected to start by discussing the dissenting opinions regarding OPT.

Comment

We know from past experience that we had problems in the OPT pack area. There are several places where we've had repeated problems. That, to me, says it's obviously wolf habitat. Wolves keep going in there. There's a good ungulate population there, water, etc. How do we deal with what is likely to be a high risk area? Especially when there are past lessons that teach us cause and effect. The OPT pack is in the area where packs have been before. This is something we tried to talk about some time ago, and risk was one of the key factors highlighted. How do we avoid problems and ascertain risk? We know it's going to happen. There was a drought, vegetation dries out, and cows and ungulates go into the same area. We're running into this likely scenario again and again. How can we apply the lessons we've learned, perhaps in ways we didn't apply them in 2018?

Comment

We could increase the amount of grazing allotments that are in that area.

Comment

WAG cannot do that.

Comment

I know, but we know we have people producing livestock. We know we have wolves in an area with really good habitat. So you increase grazing ground so we can allow those animals to move around.

Comment

Is there a way we can hear from department staff members on what we've learned in regard to nonlethals? Is there something that did work well? What were the lessons learned?

Comment

We really haven't done the full lessons learned review for this year yet, but we will soon. We also need to discuss how we take our existing tools and make them better. That goes for nonlethal methods and lethal.

Comment

My main issue with OPT is that it felt like there was a moving target for producers. Suddenly what those producers agreed to wasn't enough and they were asked to do more. I'm not sure if that's true, but that was the perception. It went right back to that "one more thing" perception.

If we're trying to build trust in these communities, moving the target is not something to do. I'd rather gut out a season and make transparent changes after that than make changes in-season.

Comment

What works in one place may not work in that same place the next year. I don't think the incremental removal worked in OPT. We've learned in previous years, like with Wedge, that removing the whole pack is a good option.

Comment

I get frustrated when talking about tools and whether or not we should do such and such a thing. We have nothing to measure our successes against. What has really caused the problem there? We really don't have the wildlife populations to support a full diet on a wolf population in the OPT area. There are multiple causes, and we're not going to solve this issue unless we talk about causation. In my opinion it isn't the wolf's fault anywhere in the state. We've had our predator policies for the last decade or more and our ungulate populations are down. I've been fighting cougar predation for years where I live. I think we have to look at how we maintain a high level of prey on the landscape. This is for anywhere we have wolves. Otherwise we'll always have problems. Until we decide what everyone wants to see in the future in regard to predators and prey on the landscape, we're never going to get anywhere.

Comment

There are a lot of unknowns there still, and that's a longer term project versus what we can do before June. What's interesting is that the above comment suggests that increasing ungulate populations would change wolf behavior and reduce wolf depredations while also promoting wolf recovery. That's not something we've discussed before.

Comment

That is in the wolf plan, and the department has not done any of this. If you look at hunter surveys, they look good statewide, but I'm talking about a specific area. If we figure out how to solve the issue in that one set of mountains, we'd have a solution for the rest of the state.

Comment

In British Columbia, they are culling wolves to protect the caribou, and I thought that was interesting. They're saying you can't have both without management.

My main question is what tools are being used (or could be used) to manage the wolves away from the cows? All of our tools are things livestock producers have to use.

Comment

Humans have to be involved, but we have things we use to keep wolves away. Guard dogs, fladry, etc.

My question is, is there an understanding of what livestock does to ungulate populations on the landscape? I'm not asking this to be inflammatory. I was just curious if that has been looked at in this state.

Comment

You'll find those studies and they all have different things to say. I think it's more about redistribution of prey. Very rarely am I satisfied that causation has been proven. When I see those deer out with my cattle, it tells me that they aren't being as affected by livestock as some headlines would suggest. I would just say to read those studies with lots of critical thinking.

Comment

I take snow depth and water content surveys that I report to NOAA each year. I measured 42 inches in late February, with a water content of 6.5 inches. That's a lot. It was a winter of deep snows, then we had a melt cycle that created a surface crust. I couldn't walk on it, and neither could ungulates, but I bet the predators could do it. The point of it is that there was severe winter kill. A serious reduction in ungulates was expected due to severe weather the past two seasons. I think there are significant impacts of livestock grazing on ungulates, but not all producers graze their cows the same either. Some are far worse than others. Some of the worst I've seen is in the Kettle Crest. That has an effect, but winter had an effect, and summer droughts have an effect. Climate change and the effects on insects and birds have a role too. People who are making profits on our public lands should have to follow rules. But the thing I want to leave you with is that not every producer is the same. Some are great stewards and some are not.

Comment

This is in regard to succession. Cattle are a tool to manage that succession. If you don't continue management on that land, that successional process will change, and not only for the better. Cattle are a management tool.

If we look at the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, you can see how it was successful in bringing back prey species over a number of years. It's success and failure is dependent on the retention and survival of females. It was also dependent on hunter dollars. We don't have any baselines. We have some conceptual ideas of what hunter success was years ago. We don't really know what's in those mountains for sure. We can measure what's there based on the number of females. You've got to have a specific amount of recruitment. We could be measuring recruitment levels up there. Low recruitment is a sign that the elk herd is going to crash. We've got to have recruitment to keep the herd healthy. Those are things we can look at. From the cattle point of view, there are things that happen because of weather. We have to think about those things. We've gone through all kinds of disease in the past, for example, but if the proper recruitment is there, those herds come back quickly.

Comment

I wanted to dig a little deeper on the “moving the bar” comment. To me it felt like people were defining tools differently in how they should be used. I feel like we as a group had wanted to give flexibility to department staff members because there are so many variables. But I think we didn't all agree on what those definitions should be. I'm not proposing we tighten that up, because I think we do need flexibility, but I also think it is something we have to get to the bottom of.

Comment

USFS, in their plans, has to allow forage for wildlife. They do an estimate that gives producers a guide on how much they can take off. That is usually some percentage (25-35 percent) of forage. You also have to do a NEPA on every vacant grazing allotment. That takes time, and I think they're at least started on a couple of them.

Comment

There are only so many tools that you have out there to utilize. Increase the space, decrease cattle, increase wolves, decrease number of people.

The number of people in America who are going to eat meat is going to stay fairly consistent. I think more and more people are becoming fluent in wanting to eat localized beef. As we increase the amount of money it takes for local American producers, we get more outsourced meat from places that don't have the standards placed on local producers. We need to find a solution that keeps grazing in America, and stop the idea that we're subsidizing grazing. Grazing allotments get smaller and smaller and smaller. We want to avoid importing meat from places that do not have the same standards we do.

Comment

I was speaking about public lands. People who have permits to graze National Forests. Otherwise I think it's important to support local producers.

Comment

I'm just trying to point out that words matter. When you speak and say they're being subsidized, make sure we are actually talking about the things that are being subsidized. Where is the meat going to come from when the cost of being an American producer is so high that they can't produce meat anymore?

Comment

The American people believe that their food costs a certain amount because that's what it's always cost. For over a decade, it costs more to produce it. However, when you raise grocery prices, people lose their minds. Any American who eats food is subsidized. Your grocery bill is subsidized. You are receiving just as many subsidies because it costs us more money to produce food. Dairy farmers have increased costs every year. This subsidy talk always drives me crazy because when you're a producer you feel like you are producing something for everyone, and

then the person who takes it complains while not putting anything back into the system. I would like people to be more thoughtful on the topic of “welfare ranchers.”

One more thing I need to get out is that part of my frustration was the language in the CNW letter made it sound like they were the ones who determined the tools. If it had been the department determining the value of the tools, I would have been okay with that because we had that discussion within WAG. I didn't feel like that was CNW's role. The problem is that the general public doesn't know that CNW shouldn't be the determining entity. They take that letter and decide those producers weren't using the tools correctly and weren't using the right ones, and I found that super disrespectful.

Comment

I wanted to reinforce a point I made earlier. I think we have to manage all the predators and all the wildlife as a whole if we are going to have success. If we manage individually, we are doomed for failure. If we already have downward trends in the prey population, then introduce wolves, the trend is going to continue downward. Wolves are going to fail unless we manage wildlife. We need to do that and we haven't done it. Holistic management, including cattle, is going to have to be the answer. We can't just manage a specific pack in a specific area.

Comment

When I think about OPT specifically, I remember in the past we talked about other states. In other states, they found these areas where depredations became chronic. There was a higher risk in those areas. I think in OPT we have found one of our higher risk areas. I do think we need to bring something different to that area. What is our suite of tools and what does that look like on that landscape?

In regard to allotments, I was invited with the Lands Council to meet with USFS. We talked about creating open spaces in forests, whether that was flat land or something else. In that discussion, USFS acknowledged that helps with ungulate numbers and reduces livestock conflict. It was very much a kickoff meeting, but they gave a positive nod about that as something they can look into. They also mentioned they don't have a bunch of allotments, but there may be an allotment out there that doesn't have grazing but could.

Comment

Where do we send the bill for wildlife grazing on private land?

Comment

Numbers are interesting because they usually don't lie. We talked about how states manage things differently. Washington has 103 people per square mile. Montana, Idaho, and Oregon are larger with fewer people. We have to manage twice as good as Oregon, eight times as good as Montana, and so on. Look at how many people we have in the state, and how intense we have to manage things to be on par with all these other states.

Comment

I want to discuss how we want to talk about things when something puts stress on the system. I think we're going to continue to have that stress on the system if we don't have a plan to handle that stress. The pressures on us were insane and all we had were rumors. I felt uncomfortable saying anything about it because I so value the people in this room, and because we didn't have a process, I think it was really damaging. I hope we can set some best practices for how we can handle that in the future.

We're in December now, and producers need to know what's expected of them before the next grazing season.

Discussion of dissenting opinions regarding OPT action items / asks

- WDFW will look into OPT regarding what worked and what didn't work
 - The department is planning a full day of internal discussion
 - Try to get it done by the February meeting, but need to discuss with the rest of the team first

Comment

On the effectiveness of the investigations, I believe the protocol says a minimum of three people need to be out there to do an investigation. You're talking about hours of travel in some cases to get to a location. I want to propose a change. Is there a way that we can do things on video and send them to department staff members and have those investigations done that way? I think some of these cases are obvious enough that we can do that to help with cost effectiveness for both the department and producers. I think in some cases we waste time and effort on these more obvious cases.

Day 2 Agenda

Comment

I think before we launch into post-delisting planning, we need to crystalize the 2018 grazing season discussion. Maybe there isn't time, but I think it's important. Even at a high level. We need to know if we need to make changes in the protocol.

Comment

I think that is really important. We can't dive into post-delisting when we haven't figured out the current situation.

Comment

We also want to find a balance in talking about the present and future.

Comment

This discussion on 2018 ties into post-delisting planning. This stuff will continue to happen post-delisting.

Comment

I think we can move post-delisting to the afternoon.

Comment

I completely understand that, but I also want to point out that we have been punting the post-delisting discussion. I don't want to get to the end of the day tomorrow without a vision discussion.

Comment

We've done this exercise in several ways many times. I'd much prefer to use our advisory role to do what we've been doing. Perhaps the advisory group can be involved in coming up with a purpose and need to help guide the SEPA process. That's not easy to do. We have some folks who really feel like they need to have their concerns dealt with, but all the science that went into the development of the plan is still relevant. What about people helping ranchers? Ranchers don't want that help, but people would love to help them.

Comment

There are some ranchers who don't want help.

Comment

This is the importance of having meetings regularly. We should have met three times between July and now, and because we didn't these issues are heightened.

Comment

At what level tomorrow are we going to look at post-delisting planning? I just don't see tomorrow as that day. Next year, if the same things happen, are we all on board or will there be dissent?

Comment

I really don't think we've resolved anything here. I think a lot of people have the same ideas, but all of us are acting individually and not as a group. This is going to continue to fall apart if we don't continue this conversation.

Comment

I'm fine with all of that, but the department then needs your mandate permission to move forward. You had some stuff in there that needed to get done as the department moved forward with the SEPA process. That was my concern with falling behind. The things you want to accomplish would delay if we don't discuss them.

Comment

I kind of want to revisit how our individual roles outside of WAG are supposed to integrate with our roles in WAG. I would like to discuss our roles and responsibilities so it's clear to me.

Comment

We did agree to stick with the protocol, but we also agreed to discuss things after the season. Now would be that time.

Comment

I'm sensitive to the fact that we are an advisory group and the department has stated a need. I want to propose continuing this discussion while setting a hard deadline of noon. Then we can set aside a time of 1-4 to discuss visioning. Then we can leave with a look forward. Does that sound all right?

The group agreed to this proposal

Comment

It would be great to know what worked and what didn't before having that talk.

Comment

We can at least make a list of what to know.

Comment

As we experienced before, we start getting into that grazing season and our anxiety and frustration goes up. I remember two years ago where you all created a process step that you would honor the process in the room and not sabotage anything, but you have a mothership behind you. You would encourage that mothership to be quiet, but if you couldn't, you would give everyone a heads up. From my department chair, I've seen you all try to support this process and sometimes you get way out there and it's dangerous for you. From a department perspective, we understand that you have a mothership behind you, and what's important to us is that you are still committed to this WAG. We don't want folks to get so far out there that you can't come back to this group.

Public comment period

Department staff outlined the highlights from the morning public comment period. This person had not been to a WAG meeting before, but is very interested in wolves. It was mostly an informative conversation. She had three specific issues:

- Concern that post-delisting of wolves would result in their population falling below recovery objective
- Wanted to see additional range riders in the northeast
- Preference to utilize funds currently going towards lethal removal for additional range riders

One thing that was brought up is that the department needs to think about addressing challenges

One member of the public was specifically concerned about ungulate populations. He appreciates the conversations he's had with WDFW's district biologist.

Public comment #1

This meeting wasn't announced until yesterday. I think you'd have more people from the public show up if you give more notice. I'm local, so it was easy for me, but not everyone was so lucky.

Public comment #2

Since 2016 I've been coming to these and listening, and I haven't heard one thing change. Come April we're going to turn cows out. Most of us up north don't even care anymore. I guess do what you can, but maybe we need to think about the timeline. We never hit June 1. We're scrambling in May every year. If we have to go to lethal, that means nonlethals failed. More nonlethals aren't going to help. Because you have a depredation doesn't mean you have a failure somewhere else. Quit worrying about all this other stuff. Wolves and cattle aren't going away. None of you are changing USFS plans. What are we doing to work within that? I've personally had enough. Hate to be the guy who rains on the parade, but the bottom line is we're sick of it. We held up our end of the bargain. This was a court case that caused a lot of problems. All I'm saying is that if we have another year like this one, we might see wolf kills next winter. All I see right now is a dog chasing its tail.

Meeting adjourned for the day

Wolf Advisory Group meeting notes

December 12, 2018

Spokane

WAG members: Molly Linville, Tom Erskine, Diane Gallegos, Andy Hover, Tim Coleman, Dave Duncan, Nick Martinez, Lisa Stone, Samee Charriere, Dan Paul

WDFW staff members: Donny Martorello, Kevin Robinette, Steve Pozzanghera, Candace Bennett, Ben Maletzke, Trent Roussin, Matt Konkle, Rob Geddis, Matthew Trendera

Welcome and check in

Rob welcomed everyone to the second day of the meeting and everyone checked in around the room.

2018 grazing season WAG information needs

Comment

Could we do a high elevation look at what happened on the ground? Like one example of how that process worked.

Comment

I think we should look into the protocol, see what it says, and then check to make sure that was followed on the ground.

Comment

Agency response time has been a common theme, and I'm having trouble separating out an unusual situation from what should be expected. Was it the protocol not working? I can't tell.

The group went through the protocol together, reviewing definitions and processes

Comment

You need to be able to say, with confidence, whether a carcass was scavenged or killed by wildlife. You use hemorrhaging as one tool to determine that. Hemorrhaging indicates whether or not an animal was alive when attacked. Hemorrhaging, when paired with the rest of the investigation, can tell you what happened. You have to see the totality of the scene to determine what wildlife was involved. You look at the spread, tracks, scat, and other indications. We're also noting the plants in the area, whether the animal looked healthy, whether the animal was injured, and other factors. That doesn't change whether a wild animal was involved or not, but we do look at them as well.

Deterrence measures are determined by the conflict specialist and the livestock producer, who work together to find the best tools for that unique producer's situation. They work together to determine what's going to work best. There isn't a set number. The minimum is two in the protocol, but you'll find the vast majority of producers use more than that.

The protocol, from pages 6-9, goes through definitions of each nonlethal deterrence measure. Section 5 goes through the different factors of a depredation investigation. Section 6 covers the lethal removal criteria.

Comment

It felt to me this year that the proactive deterrence measures can be firmed up a little bit.

Comment

I think we need to get ahead of the curve with a lot of producers in areas outside of the northeast. Producers had conflict in the Blue Mountains and the department wasn't able to provide the same sort of service to them as they could to producers in the northeast.

Comment

That is a valid thing to say. Because our attention was so focused in the northeast, other areas slipped through the cracks, and that's not okay. It happened in the Blue Mountains and Smackout this year. We are hoping to have more budget and more staff members to help in those areas where we need help.

Comment

I know the department is in a no-win situation. Going through meetings I've had recently, you also hear from producers in the northeast saying that the department shouldn't be focusing at all in the Blue Mountains, and should be focusing more in the northeast.

Comment

There is a piece that with so much activity in the northeast, you get really good at responses to depredations. In the Blue Mountains, our staff is really good, but their responses are still kind of being crafted.

Comment

I remember the first year we were here, we talked a lot about folks from this group going out on the ground and talking to producers on the ground. Maybe, if the department can't do it, there is a situation like that.

Comment

This is a different scenario in that this has to be on the department. They have to respond when we need them to respond.

Comment

I want to point out that we don't focus on the positives enough, and reviewing this protocol, I think we did a great job. This is well done and I'm proud of us.

Comment

And now you see more producers implementing nonlethal deterrents. I think we've made a lot of progress.

Comment

I think there can be an agreement in this room that in regard to the deterrents, we can move identifying den and rendezvous sites to the top of the list. That seems like the more important item, especially after this year.

Question

Nowhere in the lethal description does it say pack-specific. It says area-specific. When did the focus on packs come about?

Answer

It does say change pack behavior, implying that pack's behavior.

Comment

You want to make sure you are focusing on the specific animals.

Comment

So if you have overlapping areas, you have to determine which pack was responsible.

Comment

Yes, and that's why the department needs more collars on the ground.

Comment

You're absolutely right that it isn't called out specifically. It is definitely implied in places, and I think that's something we all kind of assumed when we developed the protocol.

Question

So what if it's an animal that isn't in a pack? The reason I ask is because just recently in the Okanogan, we've been told the depredation was assigned to a single animal. What's the protocol for the single animal?

Answer

We still follow the protocol and apply it to the single animal. We monitor and follow that scenario more, and if that animal meets the threshold, we consider lethal removal.

Comment

I understand that, but rumors I hear are that the department switches up packs so they don't have to go to lethal. This reads that the pack is inferred, but it might not be clear to the public.

Comment

I think we could make it more explicit for the public.

Comment

I've never felt comfortable with the 10-month rolling window, but my understanding was that we would leave it to the department to determine if it's a pattern within the 10-month rolling window. Is that something that has seemed to work?

Comment

We still need to talk about that internally to get to the details. We talk about the pattern piece a lot, even within the 30-day window. We had that discussion for each situation this year.

Comment

Would you be comfortable to say you wouldn't go to lethal removal if it didn't look like a pattern within that 10-month window?

Comment

I don't think we have a good answer for that yet. We need to have that conversation with the internal team first.

Comment

One of the stands we took as a group was that we said we have to believe in the science. We sort of promised that we'd always support the department in these investigations. We have to rely on the experts in the field, and that trust needs to be there. I think we're still trying to nail down some things.

Comment

When these decisions to use lethal occurred this year, there were letters that went out. So was the protocol not followed, or was there so much that they didn't want it to happen.

Comment

I think we need to figure out how to address the false rumors and the overloads of work, so we don't have these same things happen next time.

Comment

From what I understood from the organizations who wrote the letter, the concerns were with definitions. I want to understand the communications with the ranchers better. What definitions are they being told? I want to understand that so we don't have a situation where we're "moving the bar" each time an event occurs.

Comment

I felt that those letters absolutely went against the protocol. I thought it was inappropriate, I thought the timing was atrocious, and it upset me. It absolutely felt like a moving bar, and that

the groups who wrote the letters suddenly got to determine nonlethal actions. When we decided that it was the department who determined those along with the producer. It felt like the letters came because the environmental community hates one producer in particular. To be fair, I was contacted before the letter went out.

Comment

I don't think you can paint broad brushes on who hates who. I think one concern people have is how to control "hot spots." Lethal removal is a tool, and if that tool has been used in the same area and attacks are still happening, maybe that tool isn't working. Maybe we need to have a discussion as a group on how we deal with hot spot issues. We need a policy that everyone is comfortable with on how we deal with those hot spots.

Comment

I think there are elements of it in the protocol. One is risk, and the second one is the best suited grazing practices for that area where the operation is located. I think that was the issue, and I think quite accurately it's in our protocol. It goes back to the question of how we address the situation when it's not suited.

Comment

I want to say I didn't have a problem with the sentiment, I had a problem with the timing.

Comment

As one who was working through this over the summer, I think that the interaction protocol is viewed as *the* recipe to follow. On page 14, when you look at it, some of what is lost is the previous discussion of best suited nonlethal deterrents and the department's focus on the importance of human presence. It seems as though the interaction protocol tries to set a stage that range riding is the best tool and needs to be utilized in the vast majority of cases, and we seem to struggle to say that specifically. Should range riding be the standard? Is it range riding plus one? We are kind of in a hybrid approach right now. I'd like WAG to wrestle with that a little bit and I'd like to hear that discussion. This kept me up this summer at length.

Comment

Back to what I said yesterday. You're not going to find a tool across all environments. We'll never settle this part. I think we need to stand by what we said and let the people in the field determine the best methods to use. I still think if we don't look at causation, we're not going to solve anything. We've never talked about the cow. There has to be trust between the cows and the human presence. I've kind of had it with this discussion.

Comment

I respect range riders so much, so I'm not implying that I know more than they do by any stretch. I do think human presence should probably be called out specifically. We do know things though. We know sanitation is huge, and we know human presence is important. We

also know that once conflict starts it's really hard to stop it. Maybe we need to call out those areas, and then beyond that we have people in the field determine the best methods.

Comment

I think one of the parameters is qualifying the distance from den and rendezvous sites. What is far enough away? There should be guidelines to help producers have the right distance. Recognizing its imperfect, but some general baselines could make sense.

Comment

We have set our expectations really high. We have this toolbox of nonlethal and lethal, and all of those tools are put towards our goal of no conflict. If there is conflict, that doesn't mean those tools failed. It's because there is no perfect approach to guarantee no conflict. Those nonlethals are still really good. So how do we improve the nonlethal, and how do we improve the lethal? We know they are our tools, so how do we make them better?

Comment

I have wanted to separate herd riding and range riding. They are two completely separate jobs in my opinion. I think that should be two different deterrent measures.

Comment

I think the producers are being proactive with the nonlethal measures, while the department is being reactive. Maybe data points are proactive, but those are available for every pack. As producers, we feel like we're being proactive. Once the reactive starts, we have nothing to do with it. When you take the fun out of anybody's job, that makes it work. I think we have to get back to pure management, whether it be livestock, ungulates, or predators. There has to be management on the landscape.

Comment

A lot of it is about sustainability over the long term too. Producers know this isn't sustainable. We're just going more places with the same amount of funding and people. Someone will get the short end of the stick. If we call out a specific nonlethal method, you're setting producers up for failure. Give them options, and they will do the best they can. You have to trust them.

Comment

I'm nervous about sustainability as well. We've built this protocol and there is a price tag for it, and we live on this soft budget. The reason we get our funding is the cohesion around this room, but it is soft money. It does worry me that we're setting ourselves up for failure. If those resources aren't there, and producers aren't able to fulfill obligations, that comes back to the department.

Comment

Where was the first pack in Washington?

Comment

It was the Lookout pack, which has ebbed and flowed size-wise.

Comment

How many depredations for that pack?

Comment

Not sure on the total on that.

Comment

Have we ever looked at the density of cattle in the area versus the density of the wolves in the area? You can look at all the tools in the toolbox, but we'll still have these hot spot areas.

Comment

Lookout was the first pack and it is like a founder pack. The growth around that founder pack is slower because it's a lot smaller. It's just that one pack. If you think about the northeast, there are hundreds of packs around that area (Canada, Idaho, Montana). The main dispersers are closer. The main dispersers in the Okanogan are farther away.

Comment

Does the fractured landscape play into wolves not getting west faster?

Comment

Yes. They are highly mobile, but that immigration effect is greater in the east because those source packs are closer and there are so many of them. As packs get established, those packs in Washington can feed that across the state. As we get more packs established in the Cascades, we'll see that dispersing increasing.

Comment

It's like a trickle, not a fire hose.

Comment

I think we asked the department to quantify the distance from den sites and rendezvous sites. That can be an ask for the department. Taking into account the terrain, ownership, and other variables

Comment

I hear from a lot of people asking about the monitoring by range riders. Is there a standard reporting procedure range riders can use? That could help the range riders, producers, and the public. How do you quantify a predation? Also, the WAG communication protocol. This ties back to the letters. I see the producers have their line of communication, county commissioners have theirs, and others have theirs. Where am I allowed to be where I am and not cross the lines

of WAG? My understanding is that as long as I'm respecting the process and the WAG, I can criticize the department. Am I wrong on that?

Comment

Personally, I did feel that the role in the film did cross the line.

Comment

This is written up, but I think people have different definitions of things. Then people don't think they're stepping out of that agreement. Whether it was followed or not in this instance, to me it was about all of us coming together. So I was disappointed in the letters and the film, but I want to focus on how we can support the department and make next season better.

Comment

They interviewed me about grazing, and I told them that I couldn't speak against the WAG. No one told me the direction the film would take.

Comment

I missed the part where you publicly said you didn't agree with what the film said about my organization and the WAG.

Comment

When the letter came out, I called that WAG member. I told her I understood why the letter was being written, but the problem was that this would blow up. I do not fault the writing of the letter, but WAG, as an advisory group, have to actually come up with something to not let this blow up. We can talk about this stuff, but we still have to come to some sort of agreement about keeping things like this from happening. We don't want the people in the northeast to feel like it doesn't matter what they do.

Comment

I can understand the letter, but I can't understand the timing of it. Bring that letter and do it here in this meeting. Don't throw gas on the fire. That's what I didn't like about it.

Comment

I completely agree, and I fought so hard in my organization to make them see that. The WAG is too valuable. To defend it a little, both of those organizations were with us when we defended the protocol in Profanity Peak. Whatever was in that letter, I don't think it was done recklessly or without thought. I can't speak for them, but they've definitely been in the trenches with us.

Comment

I think we should acknowledge that some of us have constituents and some don't. I don't understand the pressures of having constituents. It's hard for all of us dealing with these things.

Comment

I'm torn, because I think this conversation is important and needs to happen, but I also feel a part of the group and want to jump in. As I said yesterday, when our rubber bands are stretched, we behave differently than when we aren't as stretched. I'm not defending, but it's hard to go through these things. I did see one organization come out and say they support collaboration. It can feel hard when criticism hits the department, especially when it feels like an act of war. None of us want to go back to that.

Comment

I think one thing that can help is if at the February meeting we can agree again on a WAG communication process. The idea here isn't to squelch anyone. This WAG is supposed to make people feel like they can say things. I think what was really hard was that I thought we agreed not to come out and add fuel to the fire. I think the delay in meeting contributed to the discourse. I would hope that this is an unusual year, and I think if we can agree to a communication plan at the February meeting, that would help. I would also like an update on the repayment committee so can have that for next year.

Comment

I really save most of my criticism for USFS. I think the department and professional staff are excellent. I read the decision-making process on WAG, and I think of that as the WAG, not the department. So I might be misreading that and I think revisiting that is a good idea.

Comment

What makes us feel like next year is going to be different from this year? Why are we in any thought that next year is going to be different? I think we have to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Is the protocol that WAG developed going to be enough for next year too? Are we going to uphold that next year?

Comment

The protocol, I think, is sound. It comes down to the department implementing it. You have to buy in all the way. That's what upset me about the letters too. It makes no sense to support the protocol, but not when it's implemented. The timing was awful. I'd rather sit here in the meeting and discuss it. Did they want to cause issues? That's when you start questioning people and that's not ever something you want to do.

Comment

One reason we held our tongue is because we didn't want to blow up the process, but also because we knew we'd have time in December to talk about it. We can't have another next year. We have to do the work now. I know we have the data sharing working group, and that's a great start, but what else do we need.

Comment

My only comment is that this year wasn't unique. In wolf recovery, this is what it's going to look like. So we need help on the logistic side.

Comment

Depredations are going to continue to go up. Our biggest crisis was the people part and the trust part. If we're going to make this work, we have to look beyond how we apply these tools.

Comment

I don't disagree. However, there are issues that are trigger issues, and for ours is repeat depredations in the same areas. Is there a way we can identify that and do our best to address them?

Comment

I'm missing the part where the department has asked us on advisement for something not working with the protocol.

Comment

That hasn't happened. We'll need to check in with the internal wolf team and identify those things.

Comment

We have a list, and now we can identify the most important things to focus on for February. What I propose is to think about this list of information needs we have and identify the most important asks for the department. Then we can bring those things to the February meeting.

Lunch break

Post-delisting planning

The Fish and Wildlife Commission would like to engage in a bigger way, but they haven't been able to populate a timeline. Department staff members are working with them right now on that.

Question

I've heard the commission didn't like our tentative timeline. Is that true?

Answer

Not sure they didn't like it, but there may have been a lack of understanding. They are a diverse group as well, and they're trying to come together too.

Comment

I think they were overwhelmed by what we presented.

Comment

So what we have done is share a memo with the commission that gives them an outline and something to work with. It provides quarterly check-ins with them, and establishes a committee for them to get more involved. We'll be taking wolf items to that smaller committee, with the full presentations being at the quarterlies.

Comment

We'd like to initiate SEPA in that February-March timeframe. So we want to engage with you on what subject matter topics you'd like the plan to cover. Then we want to have you take our scoping/outreach plan to your communities and get feedback. This is pre-scoping, and we can be there with you for that. After the pre-scoping, scoping starts. I think this is whatever lift we can all provide. I just don't want to miss that step.

Comment

I would like to be very thoughtful of the hunting community for that portion of it. I wanted to bring that up so it didn't get forgotten.

The vision for launching into the post-delisting management plan is in draft form

Comment

I'm channeling the WAG discussions we've had around the concept that you create something you can get behind and then move along your timeline to the high level goals. We can then present that and say that this was created by diverse stakeholders and department staff members.

Comment

Most people can never get to goals because they make them too complicated. So we need to be sure we keep our goals simple. We need to talk about what solutions work for everyone. I think we can simplify the goal in the wolf plan, and if everyone here can get behind that goal, we can make progress.

Comment

Yes, let's revisit the wolf plan and if we agree to that goal still, we shouldn't mess with success.

Comment

I like this vision right now, but I think there are some deeper things we're missing in regard to Washington landscapes. A lot of these bullets are about process. It feels like this is our goal for process, and we need to add our goals for Washington's wildlife and livestock.

Comment

In the plan there is a purpose statement and four objectives.

Comment

How is the department looking at bullet #3 (maintain healthy and robust ungulate populations...)? What steps are being taken to ensure that is reached? Is the department looking at the annual wolf harvest of ungulates and including that in season recommendations?

Comment

The department hasn't explicitly changed how we manage ungulates for the sake of wolves directly. Indirectly, we look at annual survey data and harvest data and we make our season changes year to year or every three years. If there are impacts of wolves that change survival rate, then we make adjustments. From a wolf conservation perspective, we've invested all of our time in the wolf-livestock interactions, so we haven't done a lot of work on the wolf-ungulate piece. The things we have done include the ungulate assessment, which is a very broad look. We've also initiated the predator/prey project. That's the high level things we've done.

Comment

I would add that our survey flights are all brought into one database. Those surveys used to be managed at the regional level, and now it's statewide. This is for ungulate survey data. We're also looking into better ways to assess ungulate data. We're definitely trying to keep tabs on that area, and we're trying to do a better job each year. It's also trying to maintain the old information while developing new items.

Comment

Reading these goals from the wolf plan, I don't think we've come close to some of these things in the eight years since this plan was developed. This is in regard to ungulate populations. I don't think a lot of that work is being done. We don't have anything to measure. What data we do have is totally inadequate compared to tribes and other states. Now we're eight years down the road, and this should have been a priority. We can't kick the can down the road for another four years.

Comment

I kind of share that frustration from the hunting community. We haven't discussed hunting issues very much on WAG. We're talking about the post-delisting plan when we haven't really discussed hunting issues. I'm having trouble getting behind this plan.

Comment

The leadership within the hunting community is providing extreme pressure on this issue. Our community fully believes that this is the most important issue in wolf management. This is what the hunting community feels, and the pressure is there, and they're ready to roll.

Comment

I think this information would be great for us to have on WAG, but just so I understand, when they say ready to roll, what are they talking about?

Comment

Going to court. I don't mean that as a threat, but that's what would happen.

Comment

If, hypothetically, we get to a point where there is no wolf hunting, and we have ungulate populations falling, how do you think people would feel about that? Somehow, there have to be the checks and balances within this delisting plan. Once wolves get to a self-sustaining size and geographic distribution, we need a strategy for maintaining both a prey base for wolves and ungulates for sustainable hunting. What's the goal? Are we trying to target a certain deer harvest rate? We have to quantify it somehow. We can't just say we want to establish a healthy wolf population and a healthy ungulate population. How do you factor in variables like weather and human presence?

Comment

We can monitor species recruitment and retention. We can't move forward without a baseline. There's plenty of science out there.

Comment

So there's been a lot of talk as well in regard to traditional hunting areas. Just because deer aren't at the same ridge anymore, that doesn't mean they aren't there. There's some movement of herds, and ungulates are congregating more in areas of human habitat. That needs to be solved as well. They very well could be out there, but behavior has changed. Ungulates go where the safety is, while predators follow the prey.

Comment

Our goal is to make sure we understand the population size of both our prey and our predators. Our goal is to make sure our prey base is meeting our needs (wolves, hunting opportunity, etc.). This is very complicated and can fluctuate from year to year. We have to be nimble and understand that it can change quickly.

Comment

We can manage consistent with the game management plan. I believe we have to prioritize if we are going to be successful across the landscape.

Comment

The thing that frustrates me about this process is it starts to feel like single species management. Still, to this day, cougars are killing more livestock than wolves. If I was going to manage one thing on my ranch to improve cattle, it would be managing soils. I think we need to look more holistically on this.

Comment

Talking about cougars, I just got updates that a cougar went in and killed 12 goats from one person's farm, and that seven pigs were killed by the cougar. But there's a difference between that and wolves. The department responds immediately on the ground.

Comment

Another difference is that we're in a different management phase for each species as well. They're a little bit apples and oranges now. I think we'll get there, but we are not there yet.

Comment

I don't think we should be doing single species management, but the ungulate population in general isn't well understood. You can't blame the decline of ungulates on wolves, but it is one way we can measure.

Comment

It's more than depredating animals, it's the population. I lost four or five cattle this year, and it was my fault. I'm not in cougar habitat, but I created my own problem. It's not the cougar's fault either. They have to establish a home somewhere. I managed my lands for wildlife habitat, so again, it's my own fault. It's a population thing. We have a population problem. Some people can manage it, but not everyone can manage it. What's going to happen when we have wolves on that same landscape and our mule deer population is way down and our elk population is way up? It's a tough problem and we've got to address it. We can't lay the blame on wolves.

Comment

Management decisions can sometimes affect vegetation. So is there adequate vegetation for the ungulate population? Or is that vegetation being eaten by livestock. Don't put the blame on the wolves. Predator/prey has had its relationship forever. Cause and effect.

Comment

Mother Nature operates on those curves. It will happen. But now we're sitting here in a bunch of fractured habitats, and we're trying to manage on an optimum basis. We've got problems when we don't manage the predator and prey base together.

Comment

I'm wondering if WAG members want to flesh out the vision more on the ungulate side. We have a start on the livestock one, but do we want to be more specific on the ungulate side? We can brainstorm on some goal statements.

Comment

You can develop habitat for fish and try to increase their numbers, but if there are circumstances outside that habitat, you will never increase those fish. Even if you have the best habitat in the world. One thing I hear is that cattle are eating too much vegetation on the forest. You can go back and look at that data pretty easily. I would be under the assumption that the

number of cattle on the landscape has gone down, and deer populations have gone way down. I don't think you can correlate the two. If we want to increase ungulate population, you have to either decrease predator pressure, decrease hunter pressure, or increase the number of ungulates.

Comment

We live in a reality where there could be many factors involved. It could be partly level of forage, quality of forage, predator presence, human development in areas, etc. I think we can all sort of be right on this.

Comment

Are the population goals set by the state in different areas still viable today? When were those set?

Comment

We're trying to operate in these boxes, but to ignore that everything is a contributing factor is naïve of us.

WAG discussed the post-delisting vision and made changes as a group to reflect processes and specific goals. The department will send out the draft vision to WAG members to finalize it.

Quick updates

Comment

Over the past year, the department has been discussing how the protocol is implemented on WDFW lands. Department lands are working lands, but they are also for wildlife. The department wanted to reach out to WAG members to get their voice in regard to wolf-livestock interactions on department lands.

Question

Can you include a map with that?

Answer

Yes, of course

Comment

The last update is on the compensation piece. We have two branches of compensation. There's the direct branch where losses on the ground are compensated. There is also a branch for indirect losses. This includes weight loss, reduced pregnancy rates, and other factors. Both branches are in writing, but they can be clunky. Over the years, we've received feedback that there are a lot of hurdles in the program. Folks aren't using this program because of some of those hurdles. The idea is that WDFW wants to open up that WAC and adjust it in ways that make it better. WDFW wants to start that process by working with a diverse team of stakeholders. It doesn't have to be WAG, but WDFW wants to have that meeting before taking

any proposed changes to the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The department sees that happening in the next 12 months.

Comment

I do have to say the timing this summer was kind of bad. There were a lot of people in the cattle industry who felt that the refinements are because the department feels it's cheaper to compensate than manage wolves, and they don't like that idea.

Comment

So that may have been something from me. I've highlighted different programs where they use multipliers. There are stakeholders now that have looked into how other states do things. The department is sharing that as an example, but that's not necessarily what Washington's model will look like.

Comment

The other concern is finding a sustainable funding source. This has to have a permanent funding source.

Comment

This isn't terribly helpful, but after trying to secure post-fire funding, I know this process can be so strenuous. You can't just give money without some of those hoops. They suck, and they're time-consuming, but sometimes you need those hoops. All I'm saying is that there may not be a terribly streamlined way to do it.

Comment

Are we asking for more money based on where we are after this year? Will it get more and more difficult every year with more depredations? Are we staying at the same level?

Comment

Right now, the legislature has set up a dedicated account for compensation. Each year, they put \$50,000 into a compensation account. Whatever isn't spent rolls over to the next year. Because it's fairly clunky, the rollover account is getting more and more money. We are not using all the funds that are available right now. I think we would be asking for more money if that account goes down and we outgrow the funds available.

Comment

I think the group needs to see the forms if we're going to have an adequate discussion.

Comment

On the funding issue, if everyone who lost cows turned in a claim, we wouldn't be able to fund it.

Comment

That's a great point, and if we streamline the system, we may need to flag that right away.

Potential agenda items for the February meeting

- Improvements to the protocol
 - Time of increased conflict (decision criteria still valid?)
 - Improve definitions
 - Proactive
 - Range riders
 - Concept of "best suited"
 - Change / add guidance
 - Evaluate the 10-month window
 - How the department determines a pattern
 - Distance between livestock and den / rendezvous sites
 - Communication clarification
 - WAG protocol?
 - Changes when things aren't going well?
 - Data sharing
 - What form does the sharing take?
 - Safeguards
 - Consequences if misused
 - Education of users
 - Someone sharing experience on the ground in northeast areas
 - Someone working on the ground
 - Conflict specialist
 - USFS
- SEPA items
 - Translocation
 - Post-delisting
 - Message testing and scoping
 - Reaching out to the next items on the timeline
- Indirect loss compensation review
 - At least provide an update
- Another meeting before July?
- Field trip in next couple months?
 - Centered around ungulate / hunting community and conservation commonality
 - Outreach piece
 - Maybe all invite a guest
 - Targeting spring

Comment

I wanted to touch on the rolling window concern a little bit. The district teams take that very seriously, and go through an entire process. We put all of our considerations into the district

team recommendation and really adhere to the protocol for that. We scrutinize everything before we make the leap to lethal.

Comment

That's perfect, and knowing that, my comfort level is met.

Comment

I want to say that February is pretty crappy timing for me. That's when all our calves are born. I think that there's never a good time, but let's not avoid hunting seasons and then forget about other busy times.

Public comment period

Comment #1

I want to apologize for yesterday. We hunt as well, and like to hunt, and I would like to hear more about the ungulates as well. We're scared that cattle are the only thing to eat. If there's anything I can do to help, please let me know. I think if we don't see a change to the protocol, we might lose support from producers in the northeast. I'll be there as support. I would say to the members here, I still have to say that a lot of conversation happens without representation from anyone on the ground in the northeast. Most people up there do feel left out. I'm worried about February because April and June come very quickly.

Meeting adjourned