

Wolf Advisory Group

Meeting Summary¹, November 19-20, 2024

WAG members present: Alex Baier, Amy Porter, Bill Kemp, Caitlin Scarano, Dan Paul (Day 1), Lisa Stone, Lynn Okita, Nick Martinez, Paula Swedeen, Rick Perleberg, Samee Charriere, Scott Nielson, Sierra Smith, Todd Holmdahl, Tyler Allen

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW, Department) staff members present: Ben Maletzke, Brock Hoenes, Trent Roussin, Mike Kuttel, Staci Lehman, Subhadeep (Shubh) Bhattacharjee, Kyla West, Annemarie Prince, Candace Bennett, Grant Samsill, Kevin Robinette

Facilitation team: Susan Hayman, Casey Hart, Alec Ege

Meeting Action Items

Responsible Party	Action Item	Target Date
Facilitation Team	Schedule 2025 WAG meetings.	Dec. 2024
WDFW	Create a tracked-changes version of the related WACs responsive to the WAG provisional recommendations.	Jan. 2024
WAG Pay-for-Presence Sub-Task Group	Work with individual WAG members on outreach to potential legislative sponsors for a 2025 budget proviso to fund additional research and framing for a proposed P4P pilot compensation program (with a goal to propose a pilot program funding request during the 2026 Legislative Session).	Jan. 2024
WDFW and the WAG Pay-for-Presence Sub-Task Group	Continue discussing options for the agency who would be interested and willing to manage the program and will continue to vet the proposal including answering any remaining questions.	Jan. 2024

November 19, 2024 (Day 1)

Opening

Susan Hayman, Ross Strategic facilitator, opened the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) meeting at 10:00am by welcoming members, WDFW staff, and meeting observers, providing an overview of the meeting objectives and agenda, and reviewing the WAG Ground Rules. The purpose of the meeting was to:

1. Provide a panel-based forum for a respectful, two-way discussion of the social and economic effects of wolf presence and wolf depredations on local communities in northeast Washington.

¹ This summary is a synthesis of the meeting discussion November 19-20, 2024. The meeting summary will be publicly available following finalization of the meeting documentation package.

2. Discuss and take action on WAG draft recommendations to 1) revise compensation program practices currently required under the Washington Administrative Code/Revised Code of Washington for both indirect and direct animal losses, and/or 2) create a Pay-for-Presence pilot program for indirect losses of cattle due to the presence of wolves.
3. Provide opportunities for WAG members and WDFW staff to build collaborative capacity, promote conflict transformation, and strengthen their relationships with one another.

Introductions

WAG Member and WDFW Staff Introductions

Hayman invited WAG members and WDFW staff in attendance to introduce themselves.

WDFW Updates

HB 2424 Update

Brock Hoenes (WDFW) provided an update that the Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission (Commission) at its October meeting elected to delegate authority to the WDFW Director to develop a Cooperative Management Agreement with the Colville Tribe. WDFW Director Susewind and staff will discuss a process approach to address the agreement. Hayman noted that the WAG previously expressed interest in discussing collaboration with Tribal management, and this would be a good future topic.

WAG Discussion

Hayman invited WAG members to ask questions regarding [Gray Wolf Updates](#). WAG members initiated a discussion of how WDFW actions in response to substantial depredations in areas of Northeast Washington in late summer of this year aligned with the [Wolf Livestock Interaction Protocol \(Protocol\)](#) when depredations have exceeded the required threshold for lethal removal. WDFW Staff explained that they consider various parameters when depredations occur. WDFW and WAG members discussed a situation where a NE Washington producer, after learning what to look for with livestock injuries, reported numerous depredations to WDFW within two weeks. WDFW staff gathered and reviewed information and were actively deciding on lethal removal as more depredations were occurring. In this specific situation, the first depredation occurred in mid-July. Additional depredations occurred within a three-day period in late July and again in early August. The Director authorized lethal removal on July 31, and efforts to do so were initiated that day by WDFW. Lethal removal occurred on August 13.

In further discussion of other depredation incidents in NE and SE Washington, WDFW staff noted that removing more wolves after depredations have stopped is not necessarily consistent with the Protocol (removals are used to change pack behavior). A WAG member noted that quicker action to remove the offending wolf/wolves helps to prevent additional losses by reducing learned depredating behavior by other pack members. Another WAG member observed that science is still not conclusive that such removals yield that effect. WDFW staff said they try to respond quickly in depredation situations and provide range riding/additional range riding resources when other tools are not effective.

As a result of the back and forth, some WAG members requested making an adjustment to the agenda to allow for an hour discussion of how the [Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol \(Protocol\)](#) is being implemented. After canvassing the group, WAG supported making this agenda adjustment with respect to the energy in the room around this topic, and to have a focused conversation on clarifying and

looking for improvement opportunities for the Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol implementation process. WDFW staff reminded WAG that the WDFW Director retains the authority to make any Protocol changes.

Initial Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol Implementation Discussion

This initial discussion on the Protocol implementation sought to identify system limitations, key decision points, and information needed to improve response time for reported livestock depredations. A future WAG meeting will be needed to dive deeper into the Protocol's effectiveness and any potential Protocol/implementation adjustments.

WAG discussed Protocol implications for depredation scenarios. A WAG member highlighted the effects of depredations on producer income, time, and stress/mental health, resulting in an increasing number of producers feeling no alternative but to leave their operations. WAG members and producers want to know what implementation improvements could be made for the next grazing season to better address this extremely difficult situation. WAG members discuss whether increased WDFW staff capacity would lead to faster response, based on a specific situation in the past grazing season when a high number of depredations occurred before WDFW was able to complete lethal removal. A WAG member suggested providing extra assistance to producers to interrupt pack behavior when WDFW is unable to act quickly.

Process Clarity

In response to the discussion, WDFW offered to talk through and clarify the process of confirming a depredation and determining lethal removal. Staff noted that they presented this topic to the Commission on September 26, 2024 (a link to this presentation was included on the WAG meeting agenda).²

Process for confirming a depredation:

1. The producer reports the loss to their Conflict Specialist.
2. WDFW notifies and coordinates internally with staff and sets up a meeting with the producer.
3. WDFW staff conduct a hands-on in-field exam (what the producer saw, background, history, range riding, Q&A, etc.) to discuss circumstances at the scene of depredation.
4. A larger group of WDFW staff conducts an After-Action Review. This is not identified in the Protocol—it is an implemented action WDFW has added to the process. It was noted by some WAG members that these meetings may have power imbalances (managers and staff). Staff work to ensure confidence in decision making.
5. The After-Action Review group makes a depredation determination. On-the-ground staff ask questions and share ideas, while upper management ensures they understand situations.
6. District team lethal-removal recommendations with the intent to change pack behavior are sent to the WDFW Director. WDFW considers potential litigation threats in decision-making and aims to retain its ability with lethal removal as a tool to provide assistance to producers.
7. The producer has further conversations with WDFW on the decision, next steps, and if more information is needed. This is a chance for producers and staff to ask further questions.

Process for determining lethal removal

² [WDFW Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol Presentation and Discussion: Timestamp 0:35:14-1:56](#)

The WDFW District Team, including the wolf biologist, enforcement staff, conflict specialist, regional director or program manager, and a resources/claims specialist, discuss depredations when developing a recommendation for the Director. They assess available prevention tools and resources and previous coordination with the producer. Conflict specialists walk through on-the-ground situations and often begin drafting recommendations at the first depredations, so they are ready to move forward if additional depredations occur that meets the 3-in-30-days or 4-in-10-months' depredation threshold for lethal removal. Staff gather pack information for the recommendation to assess likelihood of changing pack behavior. The district team develops the recommendation. The recommendation follows a Protocol criteria-based template, developed separately from the Protocol that has not been reviewed by WAG. The wildlife conflict specialist checks with the producer for new information such as photos and other ground information. Staff aim to complete this information-gathering activity within 24 hours of the investigation.

Identification of the Wolf Livestock Interaction Protocol Issues and Limitations

The WAG identified several issues and limitations with Protocol implementation:

- **Lack of collaboration** between the Department and producers on non-lethal methods.
 - Empowerment of conflict specialists and their relationship with producers is important.
 - WAG members would like producers to have increased ability to represent themselves in the decision-making process.
- **Privacy concerns** disclosing “why” and “how” the Protocol is followed to the public.
 - WAG members would like the WDFW Director to more fully describe his decision-making processes and reasoning in Wolf Updates, including how non-lethal methods were used.
 - WDFW aims to balance transparency with protecting sensitive producer information in determining how much information to make public.
- **Lack of clarity, consistency, and transparency:**
 - From the producer’s perspective, the Protocol implementation process is unclear and inconsistently implemented.
 - The WDFW After Action Review process is not described in the Protocol.
 - The reasoning behind key decisions is not always transparent, and producers have little involvement or recourse regarding these Department decisions.
 - Producers believe a WDFW Wolf Internal Group (WIG) has influence over decisions around Protocol implementation, but who is on this group and how it works is not transparent.
 - Producers don’t have access to a final decision report associated with whether lethal removal is authorized.
- **Differing views and perceptions**
 - Producers feel a strong sense of unfairness about the Protocol implementation process. There is a disconnect between intent and perception.
 - WDFW and producers have a different perception of the number of wolves currently residing in NE Washington.
 - Ensuring WDFW incorporates producer/public provided information.

- Expecting wildlife conflict staff to constantly share information with the producer (which feels unrealistic and unsustainable to WDFW).
- Differing views on whether Protocol modifications would be beneficial/necessary or if implementation improvements would solve most of the current issues.

WAG Reflections regarding Protocol Implementation

WAG members provided reflections on their discussion of identifying Wolf Livestock Interaction Protocol issues and limitations to identify any next steps from the conversation. WAG members:

- Empathize with and want to support producers and feel frustrated by system limitations affecting WDFW’s actions. They suggested discussing ways to reduce WDFW’s fear of litigation, which complicates decision-making.
- WAG members want to continue this discussion to understand the reasoning behind actions and different perspectives, constraints, realities, and expectations.
- Value transparency, trust, collaboration, and bridging communication gaps including clear understandings of the process and decision-making reasoning (e.g. why the WAG is not part of creating the After-Action Review process). They suggested involving a neutral third-party to help with depredations to mitigate conflict.
- Propose adding “boots on the ground staff in consultation with other staff” to the protocol.
- Noted that the Wolf Livestock Interaction Protocol is guidance, not a rule or regulation or law.
- Highlighted that a lack of resources is a systemic issue and suggested mobilizing for more tools and resources.

Next Steps: The WAG identified a need for a continued discussion at the January meeting focused on the Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol and how it is being implemented.

Compensation Washington Administrative Code (WAC) Task Group Proposal

The Compensation WAC Sub-Task Group proposed draft changes to current WACs to improve the direct compensation process after the July WAG meeting. WAG members and WDFW reviewed the proposals. In October, the sub-task group gathered feedback from the WAG and a broader group of producers and revised the proposals accordingly. These revised proposals were distributed prior to the WAG meeting and [posted on the WAG Website](#).

WAG member Todd Holmdahl reviewed the WAC Proposal and clarified remaining questions with the help of WAC Sub-Task Group members. Tracked changes were made directly to the draft WAC Proposal document. General comments included:

- WAG members recognize regional differences in how producers view compensation. The proposal offers compensation for interested producers, while other producers may choose not to participate and prefer to put efforts elsewhere.
- WAG members are open to other solutions but think this is a helpful starting point. Non-participation does not preclude compensation for others.
- The proposal is not a full-solution for wolf-related issues but provides some financial assistance as part of multiple solutions. Timely investigations are still necessary.

Next Steps: WAG members support sending the revised proposal to WDFW to review and address the WAC proposals. WDFW will draft the revised WACs based on the proposal and present them to the WAG for approval before moving forward as recommendations to the Director.

Pay-for-Presence Sub-Task Group Proposal (Conversation from November 19th and 20th)

The Compensation Pay-for-Presence Sub-Task Group proposed a new indirect compensation program based on the April and July 2024 WAG meetings. They created a three-tiered Pay-for-Presence model pilot program for eight Northeast (NE) and Southeast (SE) Washington (WA) counties, allowing producers to be paid a per-head fee for livestock grazing in areas with known wolf presence. This program compensates for the indirect or non-consumptive effects of wolves on livestock, which are modeled in order to quantify. The proposal overlaps with the WAG's WAC-revisions proposal but would not affect the direct loss compensation program or Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements for Livestock (DPCA-Ls). Data for this proposal was based on similar program models and supporting published papers. The Sub-Task Group incorporated feedback from the July WAG meeting and an October producer feedback online discussion. Revised proposals were distributed before the WAG meeting and [posted on the WAG website](#).

Tyler Allen provided an overview of the program proposal and tracked changes were made during the meeting. Key WAG discussion points included:

- **Program Funding:**
 - An expected \$5.54 million funding request for the first pilot year could be a limiting factor. The presented costs are conservatively high, as every producer who could participate in the program likely wouldn't do so. A paired-down version of the program could be beneficial if it cannot be entirely funded (e.g., only offer the pilot in fewer counties than originally proposed). One WAG producer noted that the high cost of the potential P4P program demonstrates the impact of wolves on communities.
 - A roll-over option of funding could be used if pilot program funds are not spent within a certain period (e.g., if fewer producers apply to the program in the first year or two).
 - The Proposal could have a high chance of success if funded. Some WAG members believe legislators favor proposals supported by a diverse set of stakeholders. If Legislators cannot support the bill in NE WA (due to lack of interest from NE WA producers, the proposal could be focused on SE WA.
 - The WAG could also choose to start with a 2025 budget proviso request to continue developing the proposal, ensuring a placeholder for a full request at the 2026 legislative session. The proviso would require a statement that WDFW supports WAG developing the proposal further.
- **Program Administration:**
 - Drafted legislation should include a recommendation for which agency would best administer the program (and that agency would need to concur). WDFW needs more internal discussion of their ability to administer the program, should it come to them. The Department of Agriculture may have more appropriate expertise and more producer receptivity. WDFW would work in collaboration with another agency or third party.

- The administering agency should be determined before finalizing program costs. The program aims to be administratively less expensive and burdensome than the current program.
- **Ensuring Producer Support**
 - Most producers at the October 2024 online feedback meeting indicated they would use such a program if offered.
 - The program may not be well-received in all areas, and some may not want to take money from WDFW. While not every producer will participate, the effort seeks to provide economic support to keep producers in business while improving the system.
 - Producers may prefer other solutions, such as having the funds go to the Cattleman’s Association for managing county wildlife conflicts, rather than individual compensation.
 - Some of NE WA producers do not prioritize compensation, while SE WA producers show more interest. Receptivity may change over time, especially based on who administers the program. Success could be evaluated with a pre-launch instrument that focuses on enrollment. A survey could determine producer interest.
 - The pilot program should specify an appropriate size and geographical area, with potential expansion. The program language could state that if there are more resources available, the program could be expanded to other areas. Alternatively, if most of the impacted areas are covered in the pilot, it could be expanded to the full state.
 - The program would not change the mandate and priority to manage wolves and would still require confirming depredations to reach Tier 2 or 3. Producers have some concerns about the current process for confirming depredations, and are subsequently concerned about this requirement.
- **Program Implementation**
 - The pilot program could start as a two-year initiative and expand as needed.
 - An agriculture economist should review data to ensure it is defensible. A peer review process is important before presenting to the Legislature. This should start soon (before the end of January).
 - A minimum number of participants should be determined to justify the program effort.
 - The program proposal should be clear and easy to follow.
 - Once the WAG approves the program proposal, members should lobby in front of legislatures to gain support. WAG would not need extensive time on more internal conversations.
 - More discussion is needed on what is counted as a known wolf pack area or territory.
 - A process would formalize program definitions with WACs.

Next Steps: The WAG reached sufficient consensus (one producer objected) to move forward with pursuing proviso language to request funding for further program development. Additional discussion is needed regarding peer review of the model and determining the agency who would administer the program. WDFW staff expressed some concerns and noted the need for more discussion, but did not express a lack of support to move ahead with exploring support for a budget proviso.

The Pay-for-Presence sub-task group will move forward to determine the appropriate agency to administer the program and will check back with WAG and WDFW. The WAG will move forward with discussions to create a budget proviso to continue to fund program development.

Public Comment

- Nine people provided public comment on Day 1, as documented in [Appendix A](#).

Closing

Hayman reviewed the meeting's action items and invited WAG members and WDFW staff to provide final reflections. The meeting adjourned at 5:30pm. Several WAG reflections included:

- It is important to identify tangible things WAG can do to help.
- WAG members advocate spending time on all four goals of WAG but also prioritize people.
- The Protocol has no provisions for when areas become saturated with wolves and how to lessen restrictions with recovery. WAG members want to focus more on post delisting and funding.

November 20, 2024 (Day 2)

Opening

Susan Hayman, Ross Strategic facilitator, opened the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) meeting at 9:30am by welcoming members, WDFW staff, and meeting observers by providing them a meeting agenda overview.

Introductions

WAG Member and WDFW Staff Introductions

Hayman invited WAG members and WDFW staff in attendance to introduce themselves.

Panel

Susan introduced the following panelists invited to present to the WAG and engage in subsequent conversation. Each panelist provided an introductory statement on the impacts of wolves in relation to the perspective they were invited to bring to the panel. This was followed by Q&A and general discussion with WAG and WDFW.

Bill McIrvine, livestock producer perspective (Laurier, Ferry County)

- As a 4th generation cattle rancher, Mr. McIrvine has heard the same discussions from this WAG meeting for the past fifteen years. Solutions could be simple if community sheriff or cattle ranchers could handle wolf lethal removals.
- Few people report depredations anymore due to distrust in WDFW and doubts about productivity. Producers are frustrated at lack of responses to their issues and would be willing to work with WDFW if WDFW is willing to respond to producer situations.
- Compensation does not solve problems; it pays ranchers who do not want government checks and prevents people from standing up against programs they don't like. Running cattle on wolf-occupied ranges is impossible. Compensation will not matter if producers cannot stay on their

land. Delisting wolves would restore trust and allow faster action that would help prevent future depredations.

- Game is scarce since wolves arrived, making it hard to find mule deer.

Dave Hedrick, local economy perspective (Ferry County Economic Development)

- Mr. Hedrick runs the Ferry Conservation District and Voluntary Stewardship Program, tracking agriculture's intersection with critical areas, habitat, and endangered species.
- Producers feel trust issues with WDFW and desire clear communication on WAG progress.
- Questions remain about why Washington's wolf recovery differs and why depredations are higher here than other areas.
- Ferry County's livestock industry has declined, as shown by the USDA Census of Agriculture from 2017-2022, resulting in the highest rate of lost land for livestock in the state, as well as a decline in young producers. Wolf recovery impacts these issues. While wolf populations rise, WDFW resources and support decline, producer capacity to do other work declines, and taxpayers continue to fund non-lethal deterrents.
- Producers would like more responsive solutions and transparent information from WDFW.

Andy Hydorn, local business perspective (Colville, Stevens County)

- Mr. Hydorn owns a family-owned hotel business that has been around for 58 years in Colville. He brings a perspective as a local business owner, landowner, and hunter.
- It is important to make relationships and build business, particularly during the hunting season. A person can learn a lot by informally talking with people who visit the area.
- Data from the past 36 years showed increasing business matching economic trends until 2017, when predators began to affect business. The past few years business has been driven back to numbers shown in the 1980s. This year the hotel will only have about 570 rooms filled, the lowest number in 36 years. This may be from a multitude of reasons, but increased predators are a key reason.
- Livestock producers are limited by regulation when it is critical that they are empowered. Predators have to be managed to improve business for everyone.

John Gianukakis, hunter perspective (Republic, Ferry County)

- Mr. Gianukakis contacted four hunting groups across Washington to gather information for this panel. Hunters come to Ferry County from across Washington State to hunt as a social event. Observations documented over the past three years demonstrate that deer populations have decreased. The hunting groups all saw less than five mule deer per day when hunting, compared to the 20-40 deer per day they would encounter five to ten years ago.
- Some hunters no longer feel the time and effort to go hunting is worthwhile with how little deer, as well as moose, are seen in NE Washington. A decrease in hunters has caused a decrease in business for the town. One hunting group reported that they have stopped coming to this area at all.
- The Colville Tribe has managed wolves and other predators well, and as a result their elk, mule deer, and moose herds are doing well.
- It is important to control wolf populations with the understanding of coexistence. The goal of reintroducing wolves has been met. If wolves are not managed, future generations will not be able to hunt.

Ryan Garrett, hunter perspective (Colville, Stevens County)

- Mr. Garrett lives at the confluence of several wolf packs and supports both pro-hunter and pro-predator perspectives, including wolves as a part of the ecosystem.
- Wolves' symbolism overshadows policy, harming people and ecosystems. One animal should not be favored over other animals. Increased wolf pressure has reduced cougar and endangered lynx populations. Other endangered animals lack the same support as the wolf. This year, cougars have not been seen where they used to be.
- Remote communities are self-reliant and are frustrated by external dictations on their lives. These communities choose to live with nature rather than in cities which used to be animal habitats.
- Preventing predator conflict is costly and often impractical. Producers do what they can, but conflict persists.
- Wolves and animal deaths spread chronic wasting disease (CWD).
- Correcting policy to balance wolf symbolism with practical management, communication, and community trust is crucial for long-term coexistence of wolves, people, and ecosystems.

Jeff Dawson, livestock producer perspective (Colville, Stevens County)

- Mr. Dawson represents his family's ranch and the Cattleman's Association as a representative for Okanagan, Ferry, and Stevens County.
- While WAG's work is appreciated, discussions remain the same as they were five years ago. The program, around for sixteen years or so, shows a decline in managing wolf impacts on livelihoods, livestock, and relationships.
- Producers need a plan to ensure future generations can continue their livelihoods.
- It is important to focus on improving management in NE and SE Washington. Compensation needs fixing, but bureaucracy is a main issue.
- Ranchers should not have to manage wildlife and feel burdened by both protecting their cattle and running their businesses. Producers face the biggest consequences of depredation while having the littlest influence in moving forward with depredations. Hearing community members' stress and uncertainty is difficult; there is no price tag for this.
- WDFW staff promised to complete a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2024, in partnership with the local sheriff that has yet to be completed. This MOU would allow WDFW to work as a team with the sheriff's department and the community's conflict specialist to manage wolves. This could improve management. The community conflict specialist is the rancher's contact for depredations and provides information that WDFW relies on.
- Mr. Dawson is giving WDFW and the WAG an April 1st Deadline to provide a plan and answer to the livestock industry to make positive change. Otherwise, Mr. Dawson will see other solutions, possibly involving the Sheriff's Office to protect property rights, to ensure he and his community stay in business.

Panelists were prompted with the following questions as an opportunity for WAG and panelists to hear each other perspectives:

1. How would downlisting/delisting of wolves affect the issues you have raised?
2. What action would you like to see the WAG undertake in response to the issues you have raised?

The following are key points from this discussion between the panelists, WAG and WDFW. They are not represented as areas of consensus, but identify key concepts identified by the discussion participants:

- **The goal is to reduce depredations quickly** before a pattern is set in a wolf pack--not simply to kill more wolves. WDFW policies make depredation reporting and investigation processes slow

and challenging. Everyone would like to see less depredation, less wolf removal, and less conflict. Issues have become political rather than scientific and are affected by power-dynamics.

- **Power-dynamics** between WDFW and the communities affect public information-sharing and transparent responses to producers.
- **Good data is crucial for decision-making**, but collecting it is challenging. Producer reluctance to report depredations for fear of repercussions and frustration with the process diminishes data quality. It is important to identify actions to improve data reporting:
 - Producers do not always track the number of confirmed vs. probable wolf depredations.
 - Wolf counts are not accurate (they are estimated from collar and other data, and not solely on counts).
 - Only WDFW-confirmed depredations count when making determinations of whether lethal action is warranted.
 - Producers track cattle losses, and there can be many reasons for these losses. Losses over 1% of the total herd indicate significant issues.
 - WDFW relies on harvest data for ungulate population estimates, but non-reporting limits accuracy. Better methods are needed to collect ungulate population data.
 - Hunter education and setting clear expectations regarding how data will be used would likely improve hunter data collection and help WDFW with ungulate management.
 - Hunter self-reports are not scientifically/objectively derived data, posing challenges for WDFW when using this information as a basis for action.
 - Better information requires going to the source -ranchers and hunters, who can speak to what has been going on in a given landscape over a potentially long period of time.
- **Non-lethal deterrents** are often ineffective.
 - Range riders end up driving wolves onto neighboring ranches, effectively just shifting the problem.
 - WDFW can remove multiple wolves if conditions warrant, but not entire packs initially.
 - Range riders often feel ineffective if problem wolves cannot be removed. Tools such as range riding lose effectiveness if not followed by necessary actions as soon as wolves are identified as the cause of depredations.
 - Fox lights can end up actually attracting wolves if they become associated with places where livestock are congregating.
- **Effective management** requires collaboration between WDFW, the producer and the sheriff's office to act quickly on depredations. Excluding the local sheriff from discussions hinders trust. Ranchers in NE Washington have good relationships with their WDFW wildlife conflict specialists and with Jeff Flood, who works for the Stevens County Sheriff's department. Involving Jeff more in the depredation investigations and determinations could improve overall producer cooperation with WDFW.
- **WDFW should talk directly with hunters** to seek honest opinions of what people are seeing in regard to ungulate populations, and how to collectively work towards increasing deer populations.
 - WDFW acknowledges that the white-tailed deer population in NE Washington has declined in recent years. The Predator-Prey project identified the population in GMUs 117 and 121 as stable to slightly declining over the course of the study and cougars and vehicles were identified as the largest sources of mortality. Harvest data is WDFW's

primary data source for monitoring the trend of white-tailed deer in northeast WA and also reflected the population decline. The decline is likely due to a number of factors, including large-scale bluetongue and EHD outbreaks in 2015 and 2021. There are steps to go through to determine and manage at-risk ungulate populations. WDFW may adjust antler harvest for population management and may partner with organizations like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation on habitat enhancement. Populations have to reach an at-risk level before WDFW can take certain actions.

- A panelist suggested that restructuring WDFW Commission meetings to present data prior to answering questions could improve communication and constructive conversations. This change could be made via the Legislature.
- Oregon allows producers to obtain hunter permits after two depredations, a potential solution for Washington hunters, producers, and communities.
- **Faster responses to depredations** could reduce future incidents because packs learn right away that their actions have consequences. However, public expectations and threat of litigation slows WDFW's actions.
 - Lethal removal is effective but not a lasting solution. A combination of practices is more beneficial.
 - Wolf pack saturation, number of packs, and lack of food sources complicate management and have led cattle to become the food source.

Following the open discussion with the panelists, WAG members and WDFW reflected on the community panel, identifying potential ideas and actions including:

- Critical need to improve 1:1 trust building, including through mediation between WDFW and producers.
- Involve Jeff Flood (or other producer representative) into depredation/lethal removal discussions and determinations.
- Reduce the gap between how WDFW believes it is implementing the protocol and how producers are experiencing protocol implementation.
- Respond to Jeff Dawson's (producer on the panel) challenge to identify solutions by April.
- Improve information sharing with producers (e.g., depredation reports, and how decisions on whether to take lethal action are reached).
- Determine how WAG can help develop a creative solution to make positive changes for the community.
- Re-visit the Wolf Management Plan to determine what changes need to be made to manage wolves more effectively now and when delisted.
- WAG members can reach out to the Commissioners to create support for the influence and importance of the WAG's work.

Some WAG members also expressed concern of not acting quick enough to improve the declining ungulate population, as ungulates are important for a healthy ecosystem.

Some members also noted that takeaways for them included that ranchers want to control their own operations, and WDFW has significant external pressures regarding wolf management.

Pay-for-Presence Sub-Task Group Proposal Continued

The WAG continued their discussion on the Pay-for-Presence proposal from Day 1 of the WAG Meeting. See Day 1 (November 19th) for conversation context and outcomes.

2025 WAG Meetings

WAG members discussed 2025 meeting dates and confirmed the January 2025 Meeting will be held online January 7-8, 2025. WAG members Alex Baier and Todd Holmdahl will not be present at the January meeting. The Facilitation Team will work with WAG members and WDFW staff to schedule the rest of the 2025 meetings and determine their respective locations.

Public Comment

Fifteen people provided public comment on Day 2, as documented in [Appendix A](#).

Next Steps and Closing

Hayman reviewed the meeting's action items and invited WAG members and WDFW staff to provide final reflections before adjourning the meeting at 3:30pm.

Appendix A: Public Comment

Public comment received at the end of each meeting day is paraphrased below:

November 19th

- **Don Peaker** (NE Washington resident; real estate appraiser) – I have been on over 4,000 properties. The consensus is that we are overrun by predators, especially wolves. We have about 18 people per square mile in rural areas and almost everyone sees predators as an issue. We have had multiple wolf encounters including near highways and have had seven wolf kills on county roads this year. Wolves have tremendous depredations that affect cattle producers. We are independent people so there is resistance to accepting government funding. We prefer to live on the land. We have had situations where a person was surrounded by wolves, have had people with Grizzlies on camera, and have had wolves near the high school. We would like to have a game management unit, special season and micromanage predators within this area.
- **Andrew Engell** (State representative for the district) – Thank you for the work on the committee. This is important to this district. Wolves are an issue that I will be working on in my time in the state legislature, so I wanted to introduce myself and say thank you.
- **Kathy McKay** (Rancher) – My ranch is outside of Republic. I was told I don't have a wolf problem and instead have an emotional problem. I think that is an issue.
- **Allie Record** (Speaking on behalf of Kathy McKay) – Those who know Cathy know she has a lot of compassion for people and her animals, who are her family and livelihood. Guests come from around the world to experience life with these animals. It is hard work to keep the ranch and to make it accessible to everyone. Most of us have pets that are like our family and if you can imagine watching your pet be eaten alive, this is our reality. Our livestock look to us for help and are scared in their own pastures. We know wolves are just trying to survive. We have been on our lands for three generations and have been impacted by five different dens on our property. Please find a solution.
- **Travis Fletcher** (USDA Forest Service) - I used to go to a lot of WAG meetings. Thank you to the WAG and for your commitment to NE Washington. Despite progress in wolf recovery, issues like depredation investigations and conflict persist and we are still progressing on the recovery objectives of the 2011 Wolf Management Plan. We used to hear about co-existence more at WAG meetings and have not heard much on this lately. Maybe we should re-examine what co-existence looks like on the producer side of things.
- **Senator Shelly Short** (Washington 7th Legislative District) – There are ranchers that may take compensation because they need it, but the bigger picture is that we cannot take rancher efforts for granted, and need a streamlined process to resolve the issues in the region to allow ranchers to focus on the hard work that they love. This year has been excruciating. We can make compensation a tool, but people will not support it if it takes away from managing wolves and ungulates. Previous WAG work is important to consider. While conversations and stakeholders are necessary, we are at a crucial time to look at the wolf numbers, where they are, and chronic areas that are impacting our ranchers. While I do believe that compensation is a tool, it is

incumbent that we do our part to adjust as wolves re-colonize to develop a solution that works for all involved.

- **Josie Nielsen (Rancher)** – I agree with what Shelly said. Most ranchers don't want to take money from the state; it is just to survive on the losses that they are incurring. Ranchers mainly do not want to see their animals and hard work eaten and suffering. We do not want money; we want suffering to stop. Solutions are important.
- **Dave Robinson (Landowner)** – My family has been here since 1914. Predators were removed during my father's time and my family was fine. I wanted to share a paper of what happened when wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park. When reintroduction came, the UN provided guidance to take away natural resources from people to control the people.
- **Justin Hedrich (Rancher)** – We have been dealing with wolves for a long time and had the first recorded wolf death in 2008. There are a lot of things that I perceive as untrue from WDFW. Nine out of ten people in this area do not trust WDFW. I ask about depredation determinations and always get mixed results. We had a situation with three conflict officers, and we thought at the time the depredation was confirmed, and then it came back later as unconfirmed. We only received confirmation after we took drastic measures. Situations like this hinder trust. I am adamantly against compensation. I am not raising cattle to raise the state's funds; I don't take away from anyone that pursues this. For the Pay-for-Presence presentation, I will not pursue a program like this or anything that is. It comes from our tax dollars and money only lasts so long. We had a situation so unmanageable that we had to remove cattle from our allotment.

November 20th

- **DeAnna Dell (Stevens County range rider and parent)** – I have seen hardly (less than ten) deer and have seen numerous predators. Where natural prey food sources are not available, predators resort to killing livestock. I see cows behaving very differently and are stressed with wolves around. It is not a matter of "if" something happens, it is "when." As a parent, I am concerned about the generational impact. Our children and communities need to be self-sufficient and there is no game to hunt and producers go out of business.
- **Rachel Bjork** - Killing wolves will not turn back time. Deer will not reappear by killing predators. More people won't want to hunt if wolves are killed. Maybe more hotels will get customers if they offer wolf viewing tours. Wolves were not reintroduced; they came back to WA state on their own. Look at climate change and disease if you are concerned with the deer population. It is important to live more in harmony with the planet than pollute it. There are complaints about the same things that are no longer working. Industries and lifestyles change, and we have to change in order to thrive. We must figure out how to live with the wolves, as they were here a long time before invasive cattle were brought here. People advocate for wolves because they are important to the ecosystem. It is about what is good for the environment and the greater good.
- **Teresa Jenkins (Commissioner-elect for Ferry County)** – I spoke with many ranchers, hunters, farmers, people who make money from tourism, and their families. I promise to put Ferry

County first. From the panel it is clear data exists that wolves are problematic. WDFW is not listening and is prioritizing a single species over the agricultural sector. Washington is the 3rd largest food and agricultural exporter in the United States. Washington has the 3rd highest per capita employer for agriculture. Ranching is a subset of agriculture. You can't put a price tag on the stress people are under. Suicide is rampant in agriculture as shown by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Protect people first. Range riding pushes the problem next door. We need to talk to the Commission and upper levels of WDFW to solve this problem. It is clear the current protocols are failing, and this must change. I will put Ferry County first to support the livelihoods of my friends, neighbors, and community.

- **Ted Wishon** (Stevens County rancher and business owner) – My family migrates our operations in an out of the area and we have been targeted by wolf depredations. In the past twelve years we have worked extensively with WDFW. We used to work with Jay Shepard at WDFW and even though we didn't always have full trust, we had a strong working relationship, and Jay wanted us there. Today is different. We said this year we are done with WDFW because there are no new solutions, and we get silence as a response when we ask for solutions. We have lost thousands of dollars from livestock depredations and will no longer be able to stay in business. This will have a negative effect on wolves and the ecosystem. This is our last year turning in depredations so we can set groundwork for the sheriff to help. We will continue to work with Jeff Flood and the Stevens County Sherriff Department. I am confident my oldest son will ranch somewhere, but it may not be here. We built our operation from scratch and it feels like it is coming down. We have experienced increasing open conception rates for our livestock due to wolves. There has been a lack of response and help from WDFW. Last year we had 127 open cows (over 33% of the herd). An open cow results in the loss of two calves and a cow for production. This is not sustainable. When we have a depredation, it is 5-8 hours of extra work when WDFW is involved. Getting Jeff out there gets everything done in two hours. The emotional side is the other aspect-- these problems are emotional and hard on our family. They threaten a livelihood we have spent extensive time building. Until you put yourself in these shoes you cannot understand. Neighboring producers have left. When there is a new model that offers new solutions, we may work again with WDFW but not until then.
- **Gary Douvia** (Previous Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioner) The WDFW Wolf Management Plan was drafted by a 16-member working group. The group worked on the plan for months and couldn't come to a decision through voting. One member finally changed their vote to approve the plan just so they could go home. The Plan was passed with nine people, eight environmentalists and a sheep rancher. The Commission decided not to pass the plan but if it wasn't approved it would have taken three more years. The Director said the Plan could be adapted later if it was approved but this was not true. A Minority Opinion was added to the Wolf Plan decision, and this was better than the new Plan that was adopted. The Commission adopted it with a five-page addendum for what to do when the wolf population grew. One potential action included translocation. The WAG has not made positive improvements and is harming cattlemen and the economy of NE WA Communities, who are losing \$1.5 million from reduced hunting and have lost 26 percent of hunters. There are 300-400 wolves in NE WA. The minimum

is 150 wolves for state delisting and wolves do not provide any other benefit, and no economic benefits. We continue to do things that do not make sense.

- **Jodi** (Small farm owner) – In a quick google, I found 176 sheep killed in one sitting by wolves. If you support wolves, see what it is like for producers to come across wolf kills. Livestock killed by wolves are horrific. We have four dogs for our tiny farm, and it costs a lot to have dogs to manage cougars and wolves. We hardly make money off of our product. How is anyone supposed to start from the ground up if we must manage all the predators being released?
- **Wayne Johnson** (Cofounder of Project Wolf USA) – Other Project Wolf USA Cofounder Paul Watson is in jail in Greenland under threat of being extradited to Japan for trying to save whales from Japanese whaling ships. I learned from Paul to speak out. Ranchers are going to say what they are going to say about the wolf, that is no surprise. I am surprised that WAG members are not speaking up for the wolves. There were many presentations on solutions including delisting. WDFW is not surprisingly in favor of delisting despite what the Federal judge said. At least five packs of wolves have been killed in WA state. How much destruction of wolves do you want? The WAG should be speaking up against delisting and killing wolves.
- **Rick Johnson** (Stevens County Assessor) – I am very concerned about the wolf situation and have appraisers that encounter wolves in isolated areas. I have empathy for ranchers and farmers here. I travel back and forth to work and have seen entire wolf packs. I think we have an overpopulation of wolves and think we need to let landowners protect their property and be able to get rid of any encroaching wolves.
- **Allie Record** – The laws of nature are hard to change, and wolves will continue to feed if there is food. Letting them eat until there is no food is not an option. Relocation would be confusing for wolves to be in an unfamiliar environment and would be confusing for other wildlife who have never dealt with wolves. The most humane way to manage the problem is lethal action.
- **Kathy McKay** – My animals and I are suffering. I don't want the government's money. How can people possibly count the number of deer killed by wolves? We ran cattle in the national forest for a lifetime and 2% mortality was acceptable between cougars and black bears. Four years back 17% of our livestock didn't come home so we sold most of the cattle. We kept just the animals to keep on the home front in 1700 acres. We thought the cows would be safe, but killings were worse and there are several packs. Last spring I was asked to name an unknown pack. About six of the deaths are from my land. Wolves are innocent until proven guilty and I don't have enough proof. I have too much to do for the time that this takes up. There is a documentary "A Will and A Way" that shows our challenges. We want to include peoples' stories.
- **(Unknown)** – The International Union of Conservation (IUCN) tracks 185K species across the planet. There are 4,300 endangered species and seven tiers of ranking species. Wolves are on bottom as "Least Concern." We want to get the idea out of a wolf viewing station on a ranch. We have seen false narratives projected upon us in NE Washington and we are done with dealing with this. We want to communicate to others outside that we are different and don't want to

invade other people's territories, but others need to stop putting their philosophies into our backyard. This is affecting our livelihoods, and we want to see action.

- **Faye** – What the WAG does is extremely hard work. If WAG goes over the 3-minute precedent for speakers on all sides this will backfire. Stick with a precedent.
- **Stephanie Martinez** (Cattle and sheep rancher, Central WA) – The common link of ranchers is our love for animals. The disconnect is there is a lack of transparency and trust with WDFW. The systemic problem is the lack of passion. We have passion for our jobs and animals. WDFW should have passion to find a solution. I am also a district representative for the Cattleman's Association. We are tired of dealing with wolf issues at our meetings.
- **Andy Hydorn** (landowner, hunter, snowmobiler) – My observations are that there are incredible takeaways from public comment, and we have an understanding how people are feeling in NE WA. I own 700 acres next to a dairy farm. The last twenty years I harvested three deer, none on my property because of the lack of wildlife management. The deer population is down 80% of what it was six years ago, and I have not seen any cougars on our game cameras in the past four years. I have seen two bears, when I used to see fourteen bears. I used to see 20+ moose per year while snowmobiling but have only seen three in the past four years. We have an effect on predators and wildlife has to be managed or conditions will deteriorate until destroyed.
- **Dean Hellie** (Stevens County Conservation District Manager, cattle raiser, Couaty 4H livestock leader) – Our wolf populations are out of balance. I raise cattle one mile west of Chewelah, but there is a large increase in other wildlife issues including an increase in turkeys, cougars, and deer – that have been displaced from wolf areas. This does impact all of us, including 4-H projects. We take risks living in wildlife areas but there needs to be management and balance of predators, prey, and people if we are to coexist. We see anxiety, anger, and ranchers giving up. This is even impacting our youth and our future.