

Biologists hope to capture, re-collar wolf

By Mark Freeman
Mail Tribune

MEDFORD (AP) — State and federal biologists are setting out traps nightly in hopes of catching and collaring gray wolf OR-7 or his mate so they can regain the tracking capabilities that allowed the world to watch his long journey for a mate.

Biologists are using padded foot-hold traps and baiting them with a foul-smelling concoction to capture one of the wolves so they can attach a GPS-emitting radio collar before heavy cold sets in.

John Stephenson from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says he sets four traps daily in areas of western Klamath County where OR-7 and his Rogue Pack were photographed by a trail camera as recently as Oct. 23.

“It’s not really the number of traps that matter,” Stephenson says. “It’s finding out where they’re going to be and getting the traps out there before they get there.”

“It’s a waiting game,” he says.

Once a collar has been reattached, Stephenson can regularly check their whereabouts, enabling biologists to alert ranchers when the pack nears their field stock.

The pack last month attacked and killed four steers in Klamath County’s Wood River Valley.

The traps are checked each morning. If captured, the wolf will be tranquilized, fitted with the new collar and released, Stephenson said. When temperatures dip low enough to put a trapped wolf at risk, he will stop for the season, he says.

“If we’re unsuccessful, we’ll have to wait until spring,” Stephenson says.

Stephenson says he would prefer to collar OR-7 or his mate, because they are more likely to remain with the Rogue Pack, while pups could leave to find territory of their own.

The trapping effort coincides with the five-year anniversary of OR-7’s trek from northeastern Oregon to Northern California before he returned to Southern Oregon and settled in eastern Jackson and western Klamath counties to start his pack.

OR-7 was a young member of Oregon’s Imnaha pack in the far northeast corner of the state when he was collared in February 2011, eight months before he left the pack in a “dispersal” trek in search of a mate and new territory.

He traveled south and west until he crossed the Cascade crest in late October, becoming the first wolf in western

Oregon since 1937. On Nov. 13, 2011, he crossed into Jackson County for the first time from Klamath County, then ventured to Northern California, where he was the state’s first known wolf since 1924.

OR-7 eventually found his mate, and in 2014 fathered the

first wolf pack in southwestern Oregon in over 60 years.

He and his mate have had seven pups, and one was discovered last week to have left Oregon and found a mate in Northern California’s Lassen County.

A second pup that had an

injured front right paw has not been seen of late and is believed to be dead.

That would put the Rogue Pack at up to seven wolves.

Even though OR-7’s GPS collar has not worked since summer 2015, the wolf’s whereabouts continue to draw

interest from around the world.

“That first story went all over the place, and people are still interested in him,” says Michelle Dennehy, spokeswoman for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Wolf Program. “He’s the most well-known wolf in Oregon.”

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