

ODFW

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“I’m trying all the non-lethal methods that I can,” Birkmaier said. “I’ve had a tremendous amount of help from the community.”

Birkmaier said he’s received assistance from fellow ranchers and residents. In particular, he noted Mike and Mona Rahn, who have a cabin in the area.

“They dropped everything they were doing to help,” he said. “They were literally living with one group of cows.”

Pack numbers

The Chesnimnus Pack numbers at least eight or nine adult and yearling wolves, none of which have a working GPS collar, according to ODFW. The agency says killing two wolves would not be expected to impact the pack’s breeding success.

Roblyn Brown, wolf coordinator for ODFW, said Birkmaier’s April 30 calf losses were expected to be posted on the ODFW website May 3, after the investigation is complete.

She also said it’s possible the number of wolves allowed to be taken under the kill permits could increase.

“The potential to increase the number of wolves (permitted to kill) exists,” she said. “It just depends on if the number of depredations increases.”

ODFW released its annual wolf report on April 19, showing the state’s minimum wolf population remained virtually flat in 2021 while the number of wolf deaths was the most ever recorded in a single year.

The known population grew by two wolves, from 173 to 175, based on verified evidence and sightings. However, the agency says the actual number is likely higher.



Kelly Birkmaier/Contributed Photo

A gash is apparent on the hindquarters of one of Tom and Kelly Birkmaier’s cows at their Crow Creek ranch. The cow was injured while protecting her calf from a wolf on Saturday, April 30, 2022.

Meanwhile, 26 wolves died in 2021, including 21 killed by humans, or about 12% of the population.

Of those, four were hit by vehicles, eight were illegally poisoned, one was legally shot by a rancher on private property and another eight were killed by ODFW after repeatedly attacking livestock in Baker County.

“Despite this, we are confident in the continued health of the state’s wolf population as they expand in distribution across the state and show a strong upward population trend,” Brown said.

Environmental groups argued the report is evidence that wolves east of highways 395, 78 and 95 still require protections to aid in their recovery.

“State officials need to do more to combat the illegal killing of wolves, and they need to embrace non-

lethal ways of preventing conflicts with livestock,” said Sophia Ressler, staff attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity.

John Williams, wolf committee co-chairman for the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, said ranchers bear the economic and emotional brunt of wolves attacking their livestock.

In addition to confirmed depredations, Williams said the presence of wolves can make normally docile cows agitated, lowering birth rates and birth weight of calves that ultimately affects the producers’ bottom line.

“There has been a lot of conservation that has been done under the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan,” he said. “It’s time that a lot more management starts happening.”

—Wallowa County Chieftain reporter Bill Bradshaw contributed to this story.

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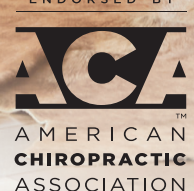
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