

‘Chronic’ wolf attacks concern Baker Co. Sheriff

Recent attacks remind sheriff of previous incidents in other parts of county

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash sees a troubling trend with wolves attacking cattle in eastern Baker County.

And although Ash’s duties don’t include managing wolves or other wildlife, he hopes the agency that is responsible will work with ranchers to curb the recent series of attacks, potentially including killing some wolves or authorizing ranchers to do so.

The agency in charge of such matters is the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Agency biologists have determined in the past week that wolves from the



Ash

Cornucopia Pack had killed one calf and injured two others north of Richland, and that wolves from the Keating Pack injured a calf in the Skinner Road area of the Keating Valley.

The calf that died was likely attacked on Wednesday, May 4, according to an ODFW report. The calf weighed about 225 pounds. The two calves in the Richland area that survived were injured about two weeks before the May 5 investigation. One calf weighs about 75 pounds, the other about 100 pounds.

The other injured calf, in the Keating Valley about 15 miles west of Richland, was found by its owner while moving cattle in a 1,000-acre public land grazing allotment on the morning of May 7. According to an ODFW report that confirmed wolves were responsible, the calf, which was six weeks old and weighed about 125 pounds, had been injured about two weeks earlier.

More recently, the Baker County Sheriff’s Office received a report at 9:45 a.m. May 9 of another possible wolf depredation north of Richland. Justin Primus, a wildlife biologist at the ODFW’s Baker City office, said he examined three wounded calves on a Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment on May 9. The site was about half a mile from where the carcass of a dead wolf was found on May 5.

Ash, who also saw the injured calves, said on May 10 that two calves likely will survive but a third, which had a larger wound, probably would be euthanized. He said that calf had a hole in its hindquarters about the size of a fist. Ash said the tooth scrapes he saw on the injured calves were similar to marks on other cattle that were confirmed by ODFW as having been attacked by wolves.

Ash said he thinks ODFW should allow biologists who examine injured or dead livestock to determine officially on-site whether wolves were responsible. Instead, Primus and other biologists forward their reports, and preliminary findings, to ODFW’s state wolf coordinator, Roblyn Brown, who works at the agency’s La Grande office. Official findings typically are released, and published on ODFW’s website, within a few days.

Ash said the current situation in Baker County — and in particular in the area north of Richland — reminds him of what happened in other parts of the county in the past. During the spring of 2018, for instance, wolves from the Pine Creek Pack (which

no longer exists) attacked cattle repeatedly in the low hills country southeast of Halfway, killing four and injuring at least seven.

“We see this typically in the spring when ranchers start turning out on private pastures and BLM allotments,” Ash said. “We need ODFW to manage the wolves by the (state wolf management) plan. If they start this chronic targeting of cattle they need to work with the ranchers and deal with this problem.”

During the summer and early fall of 2021, wolves from the Lookout Mountain Pack, north of Durkee Valley, killed at least nine head of cattle and injured three others.

In response, ODFW killed eight of the 11 wolves from the pack, including its breeding male.

“I really don’t want to see a similar situation in Richland or Keating,” Ash said. “I am worried about it.”

Primus said he hasn’t seen any evidence that anything, besides the cattle themselves, is attracting wolves to the area north of Richland, such as a pit where ranchers are actively leaving carcasses.

He said wolves from the Cornucopia Pack, which ODFW believes consists of five wolves, have been staying in that area for the past few months.

With their natural prey base of deer and elk beginning to move into higher elevations as the snow recedes, cattle, and calves in particular, become the “easiest thing on the landscape to catch,” Primus said.

That could remain the case until deer start having fawns, and elk bear calves, which will start in a couple weeks, he said.

In the meantime, Ash hopes ODFW will consider either killing some wolves or giving a rancher a permit to do so. That happened earlier this month in Wallowa County, where a rancher was given a permit and shot and killed one wolf from the Chesnimus Pack. Wolves from that pack attacked cattle at least four times the last week of April, according to ODFW.

Under Oregon’s wolf plan, ODFW can give kill permits to a rancher if wolves from a specific pack are implicated in at least two attacks within a nine-month period. The permit in Wallowa County allows the rancher to kill up to two wolves before the permit expires May 24.

Which wolves?

Both Ash and Primus said at least a couple ranchers in the Richland area have reported recently seeing three gray-colored wolves that don’t have tracking collars. Primus said ODFW has not documented gray, uncollared wolves as part of the Cornucopia Pack.



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

A rappeller descends from a helicopter on Thursday, May 5, 2022, during the U.S. Forest Service’s rappel certification training for wildland firefighters at the Grant County Regional Airport, John Day.

Wildland firefighters get rappel training at Grant County Regional Airport

By **STEVEN MITCHELL**
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Helicopters hovering over the Malheur National Forest are a telltale sign that fire season has arrived in Grant County.

Last week, the Grant County Regional Airport was the jumping-off point for essential training for a select group of wildland firefighters as the U.S. Forest Service hosted its yearly rappel certification training course.

Roughly 60 firefighters from Oregon and Idaho dangled from helicopters hundreds of feet in the air to practice rappelling, a method of descending rapidly using ropes and climbing hardware. They also participated in mockups and reviewed emergency procedures.

Adam Kahler, a national rappel specialist who started as a rappeler in Grant County in the early 2000s, said the training from May 2-7 was one of two annual recertification events the U.S. Forest Service hosts each year. There’s also a rookie training in Salmon, Idaho.

Rappel-trained firefighters are an elite group. According to Kahler, there are just 300 Forest Service rappers nationwide.

Last week’s training was for veteran rappers. Some, Kahler said, were



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

A wildland firefighter dangles above the ground on Thursday, May 5, 2022, during rappel training at John Day’s Grant County Regional Airport.



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Wildland firefighter rappel crews participate in Forest Service recertification training at the Grant County Regional Airport on Thursday, May 5, 2022, in John Day.

coming back for their 15th year, while others were coming back for their second or third season.

The training session, he said, is a chance not only to do crew training but also provides an opportunity for multiple crews — rappers, heli-

copter spotters and pilots — to work together again.

Kahler said a rappel crew’s specialty is roping into small, remote, quick-response fires.

All of the training is standardized. So, when a crew is called out, depending on the loca-

tion, they can be on a fire in as little as an hour. That’s why the training is so important between the multiple crews, Kahler said.

“(Rappelling) is just a very quick, efficient way to get people on the ground where they need to be,” he said.

Kahler said the rappel crews do not bring on new firefighters. Instead, they look for experienced firefighters who bring a solid skill set with them.

When the Forest Service dispatches a crew to a remote area, they have limited supervision.

Typically, he said, each crew is between two and four people, and they go out in the woods and make decisions on their own.

“We’re looking for very experienced, very fit people,” Kahler said.

Two tornadoes rip through Blue Mountains

Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

PENDLETON — A roof was ripped off and carried 300 feet when two tornadoes hit the Blue Mountains in Oregon southeast of Walla Walla on Friday, May 6, according to the National Weather Service.

Both tornadoes, one that touched down for six minutes at 1:44 p.m. and the other three minutes at 1:52 p.m., were rated F1 on

the Fujita Scale of tornado damage intensity.

F1 tornadoes can cause moderate damage and have 3 second gusts of 86 to 110 mph.

The first one was about 8 miles east of Weston and

traveled up to 1-1/2 miles.

The second from the same storm was a mile or two to the east and traveled less than a mile.

A large farm building collapsed and the roof was lifted off a cabin and car-

ried away, according to the weather service.

Fallen trees also blocked roads.

Weston is about 20 miles northeast of Pendleton and about 20 miles west of Tollgate.

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