

Washington state's wolf population up by 30 percent

State stuck on four breeding pairs; recovery goals still years away

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington's wolf population grew by 30 percent in 2014, but the animals continue to be concentrated in the northeast part of the state, with statewide recovery still several years away, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife policy lead Dave Ware said Friday.

The WDFW still projects that recovery goals won't be achieved until 2021. Since 2012, the state has been stuck on five breeding pairs, at least 10 short of recovery.

Plus, the wolves need to be more widely dispersed.

WDFW says it may be missing breeding pairs, which may show up in future counts. Also, wolves may be poised to begin spreading out, Ware said.

"The northeast is very close to approaching saturation, so those wolves have to go somewhere else or die," Ware said.

WDFW released a summary of its 2014 wolf census late Friday afternoon. It plans to provide a full report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in April.

In 2014, the WDFW confirmed the presence of 68 wolves in the state, up from 52 in 2013.

Some 55 wolves were in the Eastern recovery zone, the eastern one third of the state.

There were 12 wolves in the Northern Cascades zone, and one wolf in the Southern Cascades zone.

Four breeding pairs were in the Eastern zone and one was in the Northern Cascades zone.

The state has 16 wolf packs, four more than the year



Photo courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

In this 2011 file photo taken by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, a Teanaway pack wolf recovers after being tranquilized and collared. Officials say the state's wolf population increased by about 30 percent last year.

before. Wolf packs have tripled since 2011.

At least 15 breeding pairs, with at least four in each zone, must be established to meet recovery goals. Until then, under current state law, wolves will remain on the state's endangered species list.

Northeast Washington lawmakers and county commissioners are pressing the Legislature to reopen the wolf plan in light of the fact the wolves are established in that region but statewide goals are still far from being met. They also want WDFW to judge success in reintroducing wolves by the number of wolf packs, not breeding pairs.

Ware said it's unknown whether the increase in the wolf population is the result of wolves crossing into the state or of in-state breeding.

He said the 30 percent increase in one year was on par with the experience of other states after the wolf population reached 50.

Ware said it's difficult to count wolves and that the census reflects only wolves that biologists have detected multiple times by sightings, tracks, howls or collar de-

tections. He estimated there could actually be about 100 wolves in the state.

WDFW has received credible reports of wolves south of Interstate 90, but did not count any in its census. "We haven't been able to confirm, but it's a matter of time," he said.

Gray wolves are protected under Washington law throughout the state and under federal law in the western two-thirds of the state.

The four new packs — Goodman Meadows, Profanity Peak, Tucannon and White-stone — were discovered east of the Cascades, where all of the state's wolf packs are located. The state's wolf plan defines a pack as two or more wolves traveling together in winter.

Donny Martorello, WDFW carnivore specialist, said the number of packs would have been even higher if not for the loss of the Ruby Creek pack last spring.

One wolf was struck and killed by a vehicle. The other was accepted for care by Wolf Haven International in Teno after it was found living among dogs in Pend Oreille

County.

At least nine other wolves also died in 2014. Three were killed by poachers, three died of natural causes, two died of unknown causes, and a breeding female was killed last summer during an effort by WDFW to stop members of the Huckleberry pack from preying on a rancher's sheep in Stevens County.

Attacks on sheep by the Huckleberry pack also pushed the number of livestock killed by wolves to a record.

The pack accounted for 33 of the 35 sheep killed or injured by wolves and documented by WDFW in 2014, according to Martorello.

Ranchers say they've lost hundreds of animals to wolves.

WDFW, which says it recognizes actual losses are higher than the number verified to date, also documented four cows and a dog that were attacked by wolves from other packs last year.

In a WDFW press release, the department's new director, Jim Unsworth, said wolf recovery in Washington is progressing much as it did in Idaho, where he spent much of his career in wildlife management before taking his new position in February.

"Conflicts with livestock are bound to rise as the state's wolf population increases, and we have to do everything we can to manage that situation. So far, wolf predation on livestock has been well below levels experienced in most other states with wolves," he said in a written statement.

Martorello said the scarcity of snow made it more difficult to track wolves late last year, complicating the 2014 survey.

"Given the continued growth of the state's wolf population, there's a good chance that we have breeding pairs east of the Cascade Range we haven't found yet," he said in a written statement.

Bill requires natural resource rule notification

Agencies would have to alert lawmakers of regulation changes

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Natural resource agencies in Oregon would be required to notify lawmakers before changing regulations under a bill in the state legislature.

House Bill 2497 is intended to prevent agencies from usurping power from legislators by adopting, revising or repealing rules that impact their districts, said Rep. Gail Whitsett, R-Klamath Falls, who sponsored the bill.

"Policy is what we are here for, not the administrative branch," Whitsett said during a March 10 hearing of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Legislators often aren't notified of changes related to groundwater policy and other issues affecting their constituents, said Sen. Doug Whitsett, her husband and a co-sponsor.

"They're amending their rules every 15 minutes," he said.

Committee Chair Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, said he favors the bill because lawmakers can be more effective when they're not caught by surprise by controversies.

Witt said the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality sets an example of good government by notifying legislators when issuing penalties within their districts.

"I think it allows all of us to do our job that much better," he said.

While it's important to be engaged in government,

HB 2497 would impose new costs on state agencies, said Peggy Lynch, natural resources coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Oregon, which opposes the legislation.

The DEQ can notify lawmakers of a specific address when it issues a penalty, but natural resource agencies often take actions affecting broader areas that aren't confined to political boundaries, she said.

"We are concerned about the burden on agencies with this particular bill," Lynch said.

Under the bill's current language, agencies would have to notify legislators 49 days before a rule change becomes effective, even if it is a temporary or emergency action, said Paul Garrahan, a natural resources attorney for the Oregon Department of Justice.

The Oregon Department of Justice isn't taking a position on a bill, but there could be a situation where an agency must provide notice on a shorter timeframe, like when agriculture regulators issue a quarantine, he said.

HB 2497 could be drafted so the notification would not apply to temporary rules, Garrahan said.

During the March 10 meeting, the committee also unanimously approved a prohibition against using aerial or aquatic drones for hunting and sport fishing.

The legislation, House Bill 2534, will now move to a vote on the House floor with a "do pass" recommendation from the committee.

Amendments to the bill clarify that it doesn't apply to commercial fishing or state agencies that use drones to assist with wildlife management.

Oregon wolves a conservation success story, biologist says

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

SALEM — With nine known packs and six "start-up pairs" identified, Oregon's gray wolves are continuing to increase and are spreading from the northeast corner of the state, the state's wolf pro-

gram coordinator reported to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission Friday.

Wildlife biologist Russ Morgan said Oregon's wolves are increasing at a pace identical to their recovery in the northern Rocky Mountains.

"From a conservation per-

spective this is very much a measure of success," Morgan said.

The 2014 count shows Oregon has a minimum of 77 wolves, including 26 known pups, in nine packs. More importantly, eight of those packs contained breeding pairs, meaning they had at least two pups that survived to the end of the year.

The numbers mean ODFW now moves into what's known as Phase 2 of the Oregon Wolf Plan, the hard-fought compromise that governs wolf conservation and management in the state. It also means the agency can propose removing wolves from the state's endangered species list. That's likely to be a lengthy public process. More immediately, Phase 2 gives ranchers the right to shoot wolves caught in the act of biting, killing or chasing livestock.

State delisting would eliminate endangered species status for wolves in the eastern third of the state. Wolves in the rest of Oregon — all areas west of state Highways 395, 78 and 95 — remain covered under the federal Endangered Species Act, administered by the



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Russ Morgan, the ODFW biologist in charge of Oregon's wolf recovery, says it is a success from a conservation perspective.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The federal jurisdiction includes the Southwest Oregon Cascades now inhabited by the well-traveled OR-7 and his mate and pups.

Oregon's true wolf population is unknown but is certainly higher than 77, Morgan said. The state tracks wolves from signals emitted by radio collars, but only 33 wolves have been collared in a decade of work. Many of those collars have failed, or the wolves have died or been killed, leaving research-

ers with only 13 collared wolves at year's end. Three radio-collared wolves dispersed out of state in 2014, Morgan said. One was killed in Idaho, one was killed in Montana, and the third is living in Washington, Morgan said.

In his remarks to the wildlife commission and in an interview, Morgan said five of the six pairs living outside designated packs are known to be male-female pairs, which could produce pups and expand to pack status.

"These pairs are very important, they really represent an increasing population," Morgan said.

In comments to the commission, representatives of three hunting organizations said the state should continue following the wolf plan

guidelines.

"Certainly the population growth has caused some issues, but we strongly support staying the course with your plan," said Dave Wiley, representing the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Stephanie Taylor of Portland, who said she has an environmental science degree and hopes to become a wolf biologist, said it is "premature" to allow ranchers to take lethal measures against wolves.

Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said the population increase means it is time to "think about the maximum number of wolves that will be acceptable."

Rosa said the OCA is working on a idea to help fund endangered species programs with a self-imposed fee assessed to ranchers. "It would be unprecedented for our organization," he said.

The OCA has previously said it expects more attacks on livestock this year if wolves remain on the endangered species list.

Conservation groups oppose delisting Oregon wolves too soon. Oregon Wild, a key player in formulating the wolf plan, said the wolf count represents "great progress" but does not represent biological recovery. Conservation director Doug Heiken has said the state needs to see better geographical distribution of wolves as well. He said that will happen over time if wolves are not prematurely delisted and "persecuted."

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OREGON TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING (OTAC)
WHAT: OTAC Meeting
WHEN: March 24, 2015 @ 12:00pm - 4:00pm
WHERE: NEW LOCATION!
Clackamas Community College
29353 Town Center Loop E,
Rooms 111 & 112
Wilsonville, OR 97070
503-594-0940
For more information or to arrange special accommodations for attendees, please contact Laurie Sassmann, Oregon NRC's State Office 503-414-3206.

LEGAL
PURSUANT TO ORS CHAPTER 87 Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 3/24/2015. The sale will be held at 10:00 am by VISUAL DIESEL 12142 SKY LANE, AURORA, OR 2002 Ford Excursion SUV VIN=1FMSU41F3YEC33274
Amount due on lien \$17,245.25
Reputed owner(s)
Robert Tomlinson