



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife file photo shows a member of the Teanaway wolf pack. Separate groups of researchers at Washington State University and the University of Washington have conflicting opinions on whether removal of problem wolves will reduce or increase conflicts with livestock.

UW, WSU studies conflict on killing problem wolves

WSU researcher: Results a 'biological impossibility'

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Washington researchers disagree whether removal of problem wolves will reduce or increase conflicts with livestock.

A recent University of Washington study published in PLOS ONE, an international online journal, claims that more killing of wolves leads to fewer killing of livestock than expected.

The study, by UW researchers Niraj Poudyal, Nabin Baral and Stanley Asah, questions and contradicts the findings of a study by Washington State University researchers Robert Wielgus and Kaylie Peebles, also published by PLOS ONE in 2014.

Wielgus' study found that killing a wolf one year increased the potential for conflicts the next year. Wielgus argued that the breeding pair — the dominant male and female in a pack — suppresses reproduction in the other wolves in the pack. If they are killed, the pack's structure fractures and some of the remaining wolves become breeding pairs, which can be more inclined to attack livestock if natural prey is not available. The number of livestock depredations increases until 25 percent of the wolves in the pack have been killed, Wielgus said.

The UW study states that wolves killed may lead to fracture of pack structure and increased breeding pairs, but the effects may be "rather short-term phenomena."

Baral, a research associate at UW, said the researchers wanted to verify the accuracy of the WSU study.

"We found that when you kill one wolf, more sheep are killed in the first year and fewer cattle and sheep in the years following that," Baral said. "Based on the statistical models built to capture the complex reality, it is fair to conclude that killing more wolves this year would reduce the loss of livestock depredations by wolves next year. In case of sheep, killing more wolves this year is also associated with more sheep killed within the year."

The social disruption theory should be tested at the wolfpack level, Baral said.

"Our goal in writing the rebuttal was to verify the science," Baral said. "We would like to tell the audience that this paper is not about for or against wolves, it is about proper time series analysis."

The director of WSU's large carnivore conservation laboratory in Pullman, Wash., Wielgus said the new study says the number of wolves and breeding pairs and livestock at risk had no effect or a benefit on depredations.

"If you believe their results that refuted my results, you have to believe the number of wolves has no effect on depredation or is beneficial," he said. "Their results are a biological impossibility."

Wielgus claims the UW paper was rejected by four of six reviewers, and yet was still published by PLOS ONE.

PLOS ONE spokesman

David Knutson said it isn't unusual to have studies reach conflicting conclusions. The review process is confidential, but the editor took into "careful consideration" the comments provided by all reviewers, he said.

"(The UW article) underwent a thorough peer review as well as our standard process for manuscripts that dispute published work," Knutson said. "Both research groups have noted that further research is necessary in this area and we welcome future submissions reporting additional analyses which contribute to knowledge in this research field."

Wielgus continues his research on the effects of non-lethal practices on wolf-livestock conflicts. He is analyzing data from several states. He expects to release an update in the summer.

"It does make me happy to see that scientists can look at the same data set and come up with a different conclusion," said Jack Field, executive vice president of the Washington Cattlemen's Association and a member of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's wolf advisory group.

Field said the UW study's conclusion would be much more broadly accepted and understood by the livestock industry than WSU's study.

"It certainly lets us know there's more than one way to look at the issue," he said.

Idaho lawmakers work on animal cruelty bill

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho lawmakers have voted to print a bill that would strengthen the state's animal cruelty law and presumably stave off the need for animal rights groups to push a statewide ballot initiative.

The bill was introduced Feb. 18 by Rep. Ken Andrus, a Republican rancher from Lava Hot Springs who believes toughening Idaho's animal cruelty statute would prevent the need for a ballot initiative, which some groups say is necessary because they don't believe the law is stringent enough to deter abuse.

A similar proposal by Andrus died in 2013 after facing opposition from farm groups that were concerned any effort to amend the law was the first step in a chipping away process that would ultimately harm production agriculture.

But Idaho's main beef, dairy and wool growers associations worked with Andrus to alter his bill in a way they feel affords added protection to agriculture.

"It strengthens the position of production agriculture," Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Bob Naerabout said about the legislation.

Andrus told House Agricultural



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Rep. Ken Andrus, R-Lava Hot Springs, is shown before the start of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee meeting Feb. 18. Andrus, chairman of the committee and a rancher, introduced legislation during the meeting that would amend the state's animal cruelty law.

Affairs Committee members that the input provided by the farm groups made his bill better.

"I am happy for their input (because) this, in my opinion, is much better legislation than what we had in the past," said Andrus, the committee chairman.

Idaho's current animal cruelty law, which makes a third offense for animal abuse a felony, addresses companion animals and exempts production agriculture.

Andrus' bill includes a second-offense felony provision and it defines torture and describes what a companion animal is.

It includes a first-offense felony provision if the person has been convicted of causing bodily injury to another person within the last 10 years.

The bill adds some new language to the current statute and deletes other language to ensure that if agriculture ever lost its exemption, "production agriculture and livestock would still be safe," said Idaho Cattle Association Executive Vice President Wyatt Prescott.

For example, it removes the words "over-drive, overload, drive when overloaded, overwork, drive, ride or other-

wise use an animal when same is unfit" from the definition of cruelty in the current law.

The bill adds language that requires a judge to order a pre-sentencing psychological evaluation for people convicted of animal cruelty.

Humane Society of the United States Idaho State Director Lisa Kauffman said her group supports the legislation and with the exception of a few changes, it is the same bill she has worked with Andrus on for several years.

She said the law and new bill do nothing to harm agriculture.

"This is not an ag bill; this is a companion animal bill," she said.

Prescott said the industry wanted to ensure production agriculture was protected in any legislation that amends that state's animal cruelty law and Andrus' bill accomplishes that.

The legislation will be opposed by Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, the state's largest general farm group.

Farm bureau members are uncomfortable with increasing the penalties for animal cruelty, said IFBF Director of Governmental Affairs Russ Hendricks.

Food industry denies 'scheme' to skirt disclosure law

Attorney general sues for at least \$14M

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Attorneys battled Feb. 19 over whether food companies knew for sure they were financing a campaign to defeat a 2013 GMO-labeling initiative in Washington, a key issue in allegations that the Grocery Manufacturers Association schemed to hide the election influence of consumer-sensitive businesses.

The state attorney general's suit against GMA seeks at least \$14 million, and up to \$42 million, for it allegedly violating the state's disclosure law by not timely reporting the sources of \$11 million spent on a successful campaign against Initiative 522.

I-522 would have been a groundbreaking victory for advocates of labeling food products with genetically modified ingredients. By contributing heavily to I-522's defeat, GMA contends it was exercising its

members' First Amendment rights to band together and speak as one, just like any trade association or union.

In counter motions heard in Thurston County Court, the Attorney General's Office asked Judge Anne Hirsch to summarily declare GMA guilty, while GMA's lawyer, Matt Gardner, asked her to dismiss the case without a trial.

After the two-hour hearing, Hirsch said she will review the arguments and issue a written decision. She didn't give a time frame.

The case may turn on interpreting GMA's intentions when it formed the Defense of Brands fund on Feb. 28, 2013,

to oppose GMO-labeling proposals nationwide.

GMA's lawyer, Matt Gardner, said GMA members only knew that opposing a ballot initiative in Washington was a possibility.

Polling to determine whether a "no" campaign would be worthwhile wasn't finished until March, and I-522 wasn't put on the fall ballot until April when the Legislature failed to adopt it, Gardner said.

Once GMA decided to contribute to "No on I-522," it was acting like other groups that spend dues to advance their members' interests, he said.

Gardner said it was hardly a secret that GMA got the money

from the food industry.

"The 'scheme' the state is constantly talking about simply didn't exist," he said.

Senior Assistant Attorney General Linda Dalton said GMA members were well aware that I-522 was going to be a critical battle when it agreed to form Defense of Brands.

She said GMA represents hundreds of companies, but it was trying to shield the identities of the 34 companies that contributed to the fund. The maneuver violated Washington's "simple and direct" law requiring campaigns to report contributions and expenditures, she said.

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