

Washington's wolf population up 32 percent

Wolves concentrated in northeast corner

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

TUMWATER, Wash. — Washington's wolf population increased by almost one-third in 2015, though progress toward meeting the state goal of statewide dispersal lagged, with packs and breeding pairs still concentrated mostly in the northeast corner of the state.

The state had at least 90 wolves, up from 68 in 2014, according to a count announced Monday by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The number of packs increased from 16 to 18, while breeding pairs went from five to eight. Breeding pairs, a male and female with at least two surviving pups at the end of the year, had been steady at five since 2011.

The 32 percent increase in the overall population is in line with the expectations of wildlife biologists.

The larger population, however, did not translate into a measurable advance toward meeting the state's main recovery objective — at least four breeding pairs in each of three recovery zones and at least 15 statewide for three consecutive years.

Seven breeding pairs are in the Eastern Washington zone. One breeding pair was in the North Cascades zone, while there were no wolves at all documented in the South Cascades zone.

Some 13 of the state's wolf packs and 77 of the wolves are clustered in northeast Washington, where most wolf attacks on livestock have occurred.

WDFW wolf policy lead Donny Martorello said wolves remain on track to meet the state's recovery goals by 2021 by continuing to slowly mi-



Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife The wolf population in Washington, which includes the Teanaway wolf pack above, increased by nearly one-third last year, according to the department.

grate from the northeast to the North Cascades and from there to the South Cascades.

"It's a steady progression. It's not overnight," he said. "We're right on the path we expect to be on. I think it's a sign that we're on a path to our recovery goal."

Washington identified four new packs in 2015 — the Loup Loup pack in the North Cascades, and the Skookum, Beaver Creek and Stranger packs in northeast Washington. The Stranger pack split from the Huckleberry pack in Stevens County.

The state did not find evidence that the Wenatchee pack in the North Cascades still existed. Also, the Diamond pack moved across the border to Idaho.

Wolves killed seven cattle in 2015 and seriously injured one sheep dog. Six of the depredations, including the attack on the dog, occurred in northeast Washington.

Depredations were down from 2014, when WDFW confirmed wolves killed 35 sheep, four cattle and dog. The total does not include suspected but unconfirmed livestock losses to wolves.

WDFW documented seven wolf mortalities in 2015. Three wolves were legally harvested on the Spokane Indian Reservation. One wolf died while being captured for collaring on the Colville Indian Reservation.

One wolf, the first known wolf to venture west of the Cascades, was hit and killed by a vehicle on Interstate 90, while another one was shot in self-defense by a homeowner in the Blue Mountains. One wolf died of unknown causes.

Study says "Ag gag" laws reduce consumer trust

Loss of trust seen across demographics

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Criminalizing secret recordings of agricultural operations is more likely to breed suspicion of farmers than to shield their public image, a recent study found.

So-called "ag gag" laws, which prohibit hidden-camera filming and obtaining employment under false pretenses, substantially reduce trust in agriculture among U.S. consumers, according to researchers from the University of British Columbia.

"There are reputational consequences. People are likely to be left with a bad taste in their mouths when they're made aware of them,"

said Jesse Robbins, one of the study's authors.

Among participants asked to read an explanation of such laws, the trust rating for farmers was about 20 percent lower than for a control group that read a generic description of hay.

Participants informed about the laws were also less comfortable with the current status of farm animal welfare and were more likely to support stricter regulations for animal agriculture.

The decrease in trust was seen across multiple demographics, regardless of the participants' political ideology or where they lived.

"Rural Republicans had a similar drop in trust as urban vegetarians," said Robbins.

It's significant that even among people positively-inclined toward farming, such

as conservatives and rural residents, awareness of "ag gag" laws caused ratings to cross the line from trust to distrust, he said.

The impact also extended beyond the domain of animal welfare, with participants expressing less trust in farmers for their environmental stewardship, Robbins said.

These findings are notable because previous psychological research has established that trust is a hard-won commodity not worth squandering, he said. "It's a whole lot easier to lose than it is to gain."

Bob Naerebout, executive director of the Idaho Dairy-men's Association, said his group recognized such reputational risks in 2014 when it decided to support the Idaho Ag Security Act, which critics have assailed as an

"ag gag" statute.

The law was struck down by a federal judge as unconstitutionally limiting free speech last year and is now being reviewed by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Despite the potential effect on consumer perceptions, IDA advocated for the law because it's meant to protect property rights in agriculture, Naerebout said.

The farm industry felt it shouldn't have to tolerate activists who are willing to deceive the public, he said.

Sen. Jim Rice, R-Caldwell, said he sponsored the bill because farmers should have a right to determine what activities occur on their properties.

"Our purpose wasn't to protect the reputation of agriculture so much as prevent certain types of attacks," he said.

LAMBING SCHOOL

Vet students get hands-on experience

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

LAMONT, Wash. — At times it was a little hard to tell who was more nervous during the ear-tagging lesson — the lambs getting the tag or the students who were doing the tagging for the first time.

Seven Washington State University veterinary students attended the Washington State Sheep Producers lambing school March 12, taught by Jill Swannack, a Lamont, Wash., veterinarian and president of the organization.

The course for the day included ear-tagging, castrating and docking tails, examining a carcass and observing a birth.

The school teaches the students techniques to make lambing go more smoothly, Swannack said.

"I hope they come away with what they want to learn," she said. "They have a long



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington State University veterinary students, including Allison Reeder, left, look on as veterinarian and Washington State Sheep Producers president Jill Swannack explains how to ear-tag, castrate and dock lambs March 12 in Lamont, Wash.

road ahead of them. What they need to learn is how fun it is to learn."

Sara Packebush, a second-year veterinary student at WSU, wanted to get a better understanding of lamb processing and the timing of key procedures.

"It's a really good opportunity," Packebush said. "This is

a lot more animals per student than we can get sometimes at the vet school, where there are three vet students on one lamb. Each person gets to handle more than one lamb at a time."

Liz Soler, also a second-year vet student, wanted to see how a larger flock would manage. She hopes to

go into a rural mixed-animal practice for large and small animals.

"It's really important for a veterinarian to know what a producer has to do, so we can help educate the producers who are less knowledgeable, and also help producers who are more knowledgeable improve their management practice," she said. "We do a lot of book learning in vet school, so it's really important to get hands-on opportunities."

With new veterinarians entering the sheep industry, Swannack said the school is critical.

"The only way to get experience is to experience it," she said. "That's why we have traditionally offered a lambing school, so people can learn these skills before they need them."

The organization offers the school in the spring, with as many as three classes, Swannack said. The next classes will be April 2 and April 30, also on Swannack's ranch in Lamont.

Rancher, cattle industry leader Burke dies at age 80

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — Mary Lou Masterson Burke, a cattle rancher well known for her expertise in water and private property rights, died March 13 in John Day, Ore. She was 80.

Burke was born July 3, 1935, in Ellensburg, and grew up on the historic Masterson Ranch, homesteaded by her great-grandfather in 1880, in the Teanaway Valley.

She married Pat Burke in 1956 and they ranched and raised their family together in the Teanaway until moving to Fox, Ore., near John Day,

in 2006. The family operates ranches near Fox and Ellensburg.

Mary Burke was the first woman president of the Washington State Cattlemen's Association and was past president of Kittitas County Cattlemen and Kittitas County Cattlemen. She served on committees of the National Cattlemen's Association.

"She's been friends of my grandparents longer than I've been alive. She was always an inspiration to me, encouraged me to become an attorney and mentored me," said Toni Meacham, a Connell attorney active in agricultural issues.

"She would say, 'Go forth

and do good.' She always told me that," Meacham said.

Marriage interrupted Burke's college career but she became self taught in water and private property issues and law, and became a knowledgeable resource to legislators and attorneys in the 1980s and 1990s, Meacham said.

She testified before Congress multiple times on agricultural issues and people across the nation consulted her, she said.

Her interest in law was nurtured when she went to work in a law office in the 1970s when cattle prices were low. She had a quick grasp of issues and written material.

"She read the whole ESA (Endangered Species Act) and could digest it, remember it and see the impacts," Meacham said.

She had a distinctive voice, a way with words and



Courtesy of Marty Stingley Photography Rancher Mary Burke, of Ellensburg, Wash., and Fox, Ore., was known as a self-taught expert on water and private property rights. She died March 13 at age 80.

"could insult people and they wouldn't even know they'd been insulted," Meacham said. "She didn't speak frivolously. She always had a point and would get to it even when you thought she was rambling."

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