

# Sharp disagreements mark path as Oregon begins wolf plan review

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

SALEM — Opposing sides in Oregon's continuing wolf argument both believe some aspects of the state's management plan should be reviewed by independent parties.

Speaking March 18 to the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Commission, conservationists repeated their view that an external scientific review should have been done before the commission took wolves off the state endangered species list last November.

Livestock, hunting and farming interests, meanwhile, suggested a third-party should make the call on whether livestock attacks are listed as confirmed wolf depredation or only "probable," which don't count toward lethal control decisions.

On just about every other aspect of wolves in Oregon, however, the two sides disagree. Panelists representing both sides were invited to meet with the ODFW Commission and stake out their positions as the state begins what is expected to be a nine-month review of the wolf management plan.

The review begins as cattle and sheep producers, hunters and the Oregon Farm Bureau have scored a couple of key victories. First was the commission's delisting decision in November, and the Oregon Legislature followed that up by passing a bill that protects the decision from legal challenge. Since then, the state's annual wolf survey showed the state population grew 36 percent in 2015. Wildlife biologist Russ Morgan, ODFW's wolf recovery manager, said the numbers represent a continuing success story as wolves expand in number and range.

Panelists from Oregon Wild, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife and Cascadia Wildlands repeated their view that del-



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Michael Finley, right, chair of the ODFW Commission, discusses wolf management with Rob Klavins, left, of Oregon Wild and Amaroq Weiss, second from left, of the Center for Biological Diversity.

isting was premature and not supported by independent scientific review. Representatives said they oppose a state population cap or range limits on wolves. They also oppose sport hunting of wolves, which some think could be an eventual result of delisting and plan revision.

Amaroq Weiss, of the Center for Biological Diversity, said some Oregon actions undermine wolf protection. The Legislature passed a bill increasing the fines for poaching, she said, but excused "unintentional take."

"The law provides an absolute defense for someone who shoots a wolf and claims he thought it was a coyote," she said, noting the case of an Oregon hunter who was prosecuted for a 2015 incident. "The state is saying, claim it was an accident and we'll turn our back."

Rob Klavins, Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild, said wolf poaching has increased, the delisting and legislative action was "unfair and unethical" and discussions are marked by "renewed conflict and controversy" even as a majority of Oregonians favor wolf protections.

"We're skeptical, but we are here again," he told the commission.

The other side had points to

make as well.

Mary Anne Nash, an attorney with the Oregon Farm Bureau, said conservationists' complaints about transparency and scientific review are "in the eye of the beholder."

"They mean their preferred outcomes, and their science," she said.

Dave Wiley, with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, said ODFW must protect Oregon's deer and elk herds as wolf packs expand.

Jim Akenson, conservation director for the Oregon Hunters Association, said it's "wonderful" to restore wolves to the ecosystem, "But at some point there needs to be management. We've reached that point," he said.

Wallowa County rancher Todd Nash, head of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association wolf task force, said ODFW has too high a bar for confirming wolf attacks and an outside party ought to do it instead. He and others also favor establishing geographic management zones in which wolves could be controlled on a more local basis.

Morgan, the ODFW biologist, said Oregon's minimum wolf population at the close of 2015 was 110, with 12 packs and 11 breeding pairs. A recently updated count showed 35 pups survived through the year.



Courtesy of Owyhee Irrigation District

Snowpack in the Owyhee Basin, which feeds water into the Owyhee Reservoir, is shown in this aerial photo taken Feb. 26. The OID's 2016 water supply outlook is good, irrigators were told March 22 during the district's annual meeting.

# Owyhee water allotment get 3 acre-feet, could go to 4

## Reservoir filling after two years of drought

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — The Owyhee Irrigation District board of directors has set the 2016 allotment for OID patrons at 3 acre-feet.

That's significantly more than irrigators have received the past three years and the allotment is expected to increase as more water flows into the Owyhee Reservoir.

Board members opted to be conservative and set the allotment based only on what is currently in the reservoir, OID Manager Jay Chamberlin said March 22 during the group's annual meeting.

"We know there is 3 acre-feet in the reservoir today and we can deliver that to you," he said.

The reservoir provides irrigation water for 1,800 farms and 118,000 acres in Malheur County in Eastern Oregon and around Homedale and Marsing in southwestern Idaho.

Significantly more water is forecast to flow into the reservoir and "as that water becomes available, that allotment will be increased," Chamberlin said. "I feel very comfortable saying the allotment is going to go up from that 3 acre-feet. How far, we can't say."

OID patrons are entitled to up to 4 acre-feet in a normal water year but only received 1.7 acre-feet in 2015 and 1.6 acre-feet in 2014 because of lingering drought conditions.

Based on the past 30 years, total reservoir in-flows average 534,000 acre-feet a year, but only 96,000 acre-feet reached the reservoir in 2015 and 106,000 in 2014, said Brian Sauer, a water operations manager for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

But the bureau is forecasting that total Owyhee Reservoir in-flows will reach 862,000 acre-feet this year,

"Things look a lot better than where they were last year," Sauer said. "There's a fair amount of snow still up in the basin (to) come into the reservoir."

Snowpack levels were up significantly this year, said Chamberlin, who flew over the basin on Feb. 26.

"It was refreshing to see how much snow we had over the whole basin," he said. "We've got a good start here."

Based on the snowpack levels and the Bureau of Reclamation total reservoir in-flow forecast for 2016, a lot more water is headed for the reservoir, Chamberlin said.

He said he is confident OID patrons will end up with their full 4 acre-foot allotment this year.

"But until we get that, we're going to be very cautious," he said.

The target date to start the OID system is April 11 but the board will meet again next week and that could change depending on weather conditions, Chamberlin said.

There was no storage water left in the reservoir at the end of the 2015 season, the fourth straight year that happened. That was the longest such stretch since at least 1966, Sauer said.

# Oregon FFA convention offers students view of future

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — If the 1,400 students attending the Oregon FFA state convention had some questions about career prospects, Alexzandra "Alex" Murphy was offering some answers.

Murphy teaches a new precision irrigated agriculture program at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton, and she said ag employers are clamoring to hire people trained in new technology.

"People have been asking me for students," she said while stationed at a college information booth. "There is a huge demand for workers. Everywhere I go, they say, 'We want more good workers.'"

Students with FFA experience are particularly attractive to employers, she said, because they're already tuned into multiple facets of agriculture. And it hasn't been difficult recruiting students to study precision ag applications, Murphy added.

"I don't know too many kids who don't get excited about technology," she said with a laugh. "Turning off your (irrigation) pivot with a cell phone is awesome."

Blue Mountain Community College was among the career vendors participating in the convention, held March 18-21 at Oregon State University. Students from FFA chapters across the state attended. Among many activities, they took part in public speaking and parliamentary

procedure competitions, heard from guest speakers and had a little fun on the side, such as a session on western dancing.

State officers for 2016-17 were selected as well. They are: President Shea Booster, of Bend; Vice President Hailee Patterson, of Imbler; Secretary Liberty Greenlund, of Yamhill-Carlton; Treasurer Raymond Seal, of Joseph; Reporter Zanden Unger, of Dallas; and Sentinel Bryson Price, of Sutherlin.

While advisers such as Murphy of BMCC were available to offer career advice, other convention speakers had something to say about life in general.

Kelly Barnes, a motivational speaker from Oklahoma, used a fast-paced presentation to suggest students should examine their lives and make changes.



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