

Wolves

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WDFW has confirmed that the pack has killed or injured eight cattle and probably is responsible for five more attacks on livestock this summer.

WDFW’s policy calls for the state to use lethal control after four confirmed depredations, provided ranchers had taken steps to prevent conflicts between wolves and livestock.

WDFW investigators confirmed Sept. 21 that wolves in the Smackout pack, whose territory straddles Stevens and Pend Oreille counties, killed a calf, the department’s wolf policy coordinator, Donny

Martorello, said in an email. The depredation was the first confirmed attack by the pack this year. The pack fatally injured a calf in October 2015, according to WDFW records.

Also Sept. 21, the Spokane Tribe of Indians reported a wolf had been harvested on the reservation. The tribe also reported in July that a wolf had been harvested.

The tribe allows enrolled members to hunt wolves within the 159,000-acre reservation, with an annual limit of six wolves.

The Spokane tribe reported in 2015 harvesting three wolves in the Huckleberry pack, the only legal shooting of wolves in the state last year, according to WDFW.

Hunting wolves is not allowed in Washington except on tribal lands.

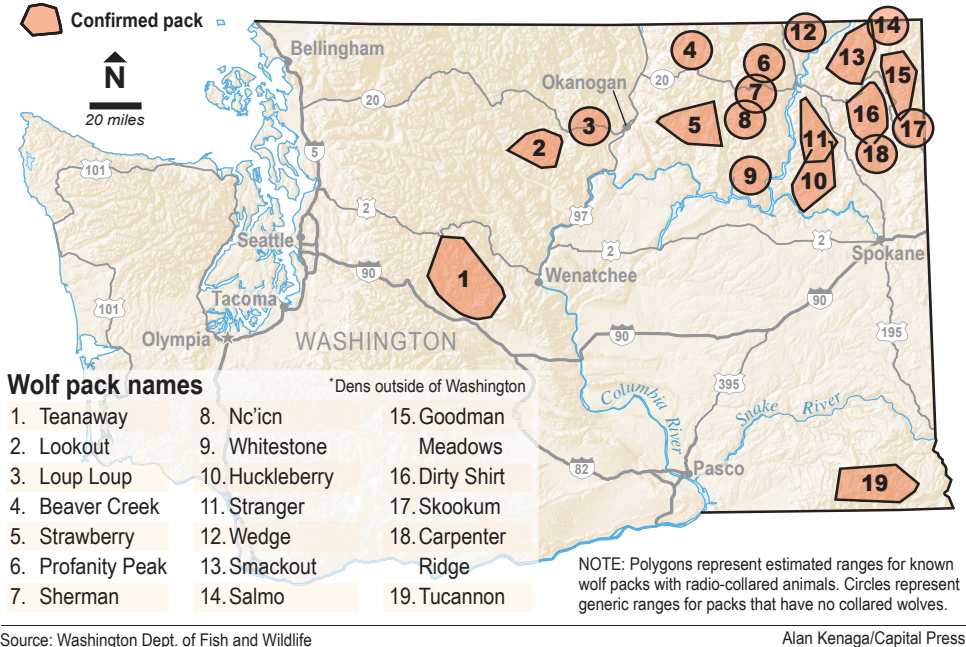
WDFW enlisted the USDA’s Wildlife Services to shoot one wolf from the Huckleberry pack in 2014. The pack was preying on sheep.

Since then, a federal judge has barred Wildlife Services from assisting WDFW with lethal removal, unless the federal agency conducts a more thorough review of the environmental impacts of removing wolves.

Wolves are not federally protected in the eastern one-third of Washington, where attacks on livestock are occurring, but are on the state’s protected species list.

Known Washington wolf packs

(As of June 15)



Ada

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Idaho’s population growth is among the fastest in the nation due to a couple of main factors, according to Craig Shaul, a research supervisor at the state Department of Labor.

Idaho’s job growth is among the nation’s fastest and “a lot of those jobs will be located in urban centers such as Boise,” he said.

The state is also attracting retirees looking to settle in a quiet area with a high quality of life and access to good medical care.

Don Tolmie, production manager for Treasure Valley Seed Co. and an Idaho Bean Commission member, said he’s concerned about the political ramifications of the population shift. He’s equally concerned the shift will result in a loss of farmland in Ada and Canyon counties.

“Agriculture doesn’t have the voice it once had in Idaho and, sooner or later, we are going to be forced out,” he said. “And I’m not sure the general populace in Idaho gives a damn.”

Idaho has 35 legislative districts; 13 of them are in Ada and Canyon counties. At the opposite end of the scale, District 32 in the southeastern corner of the state encompasses four counties: Bear Lake, Caribou, Franklin and Oneida. Districts are based on the population.

The growth spurt is projected to continue, too.

According to COMPASS, a southwestern Idaho planning organization, the combined population of Ada and Canyon counties will increase from 646,000 now to more than 1 million by 2040. That means those two counties will have 43 percent of the state’s total population.

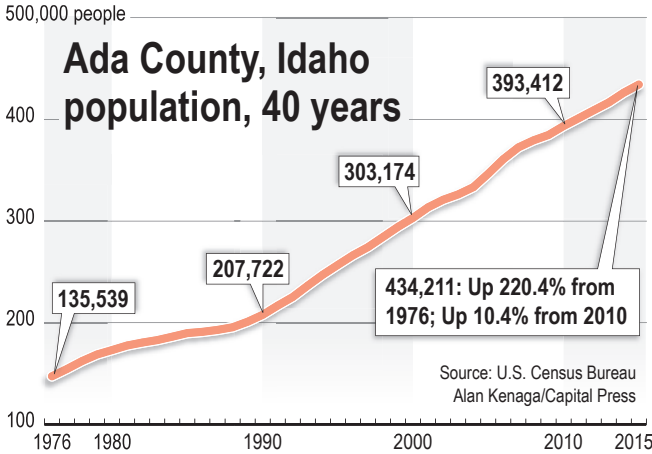
Some farmers, including Mark Darrington of Declo, say the loss of rural Idaho’s clout in the legislature is inevitable and the industry needs to make sure it continues to employ high-quality lobbyists who can make sure urban lawmakers understand the important role agriculture plays in the state’s economy.

Agriculture drives economy

According to University of Idaho economists, agriculture



People shop at the Capital City Public Market in downtown Boise Sept. 10. As Idaho’s population shifts from rural counties to the Boise area, farmers are increasingly concerned about city folks far removed from the farm making decisions that impact their industry.



is the state’s top economic sector and is responsible for one of every seven jobs in the state, 20 percent of total sales and 14 percent of Idaho’s gross state product.

“Absolutely we stand in danger of losing our agricultural clout and of course that’s a concern,” Darrington said. “But I don’t know how you can change the way the (system) is set up. The rules are the rules of how we make legislative districts.”

He said that makes it more important to ensure that legislators understand “there’s a huge economic engine out there that drives the state that is outside of Ada County.”

Food Producers of Idaho Executive Director Rick Waitley said folks in the farming industry “should not assume ... that legislators, because

they are from the urban area, are not understanding and sympathetic to the needs of the agriculture industry.”

“We need to always be mindful to look for every opportunity to promote, educate and advocate for agriculture when we can,” said Waitley, who is also state director of Idaho Ag in the Classroom. The nonprofit sends volunteers into school classrooms to teach students about agriculture.

Tolmie, the bean commission member, was less hopeful about the ability to “get through” to urban folks, some of whom already hold strong opinions about farming.

“Education is probably the solution but very few people truly want to be educated” when it comes to production agriculture, Tolmie said.

“They want the romantic version of a farm — 2 acres, organic and some chickens. But the reality of farming, they want nothing to do with.”

Varying opinions

Random interviews with half a dozen Boise residents showed mixed results when it comes to their understanding of farming and support of production agriculture.

Jacy Stevens has lived in Boise five years and works at a hair salon. She said she doesn’t have strong opinions on issues such as genetically modified crops, organic foods or the use of pesticides.

“I don’t know how to produce food so I’m not going to sit there and tell (farmers) they can’t use pesticides if that’s what they need,” she said. “I’m not a professional in that field, so any choices that (farmers) make when it comes to organic or the use of pesticides, all of my trust goes into them ... because they obviously know how to grow food.”

Others had stronger — and divergent — opinions about hot-topic agricultural issues.

Rick Hobson, who has lived in Boise since 1959, said it’s important to support farmers — “That’s where we get our food” — but he also said pesticides, genetically modified crops called GMOs,

the die-off of honeybees and climate change are important concerns to him.

Farmers, particularly big ones, “want to make a profit but they need to be held accountable,” he said. “The average citizen in Boise, as well as rural residents, needs to have influence on what’s going on with them.”

Darrell Defabry, who is in the real estate business, said he loves farmers: “Why wouldn’t you?”

But when asked if that includes bigger farms, he admitted, “I prefer smaller farmers.”

He also prefers non-GMO crops, as does Christopher Cook, an attorney.

But while Defabry said he wouldn’t vote to ban the planting of GMO crops in Idaho, Cook would.

“I would support a ban on (GMOs),” Cook said. “There are so many subsidies for (farmers) that I’m not really concerned about their ability to make money. I think they’re doing pretty well. I think they should think less about profits and more about sustainability and people’s health.”

Opportunity to educate

Rep. Gayle Batt, a Republican from Wilder and member of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee, said the writing’s on the wall that Boise will be the next Portland or Seattle, meaning that urbanites will use their political clout to make decisions for the rest of the state.

But rather than shun or fear those urbanites, agriculture needs to try to understand and reach out to them, said Batt.

“We need to look at them as opportunities for education and not fear them,” she said. “It would be a mistake on our part if we didn’t know what they are thinking and kept ignoring it.”

Harris, the Republican rancher, stayed in Meridian, a fast-growing suburb of Boise, for almost three months during the 2016 legislative session. He said there appear to be plenty of people in Ada County who still understand the important role agriculture plays in the state.

On the flip side, “As people get disconnected from the land, they lose interest in it,” he added.

“I think people for the most part still understand the importance of agriculture,” Harris said. “But agriculture can’t drop the ball. We have to keep educating people.”

Land

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The report, “The Future of Oregon’s Agricultural Land,” said the average age of Oregon farmers and ranchers is now 60, up from 55 in 2002.

The report was produced by Oregon State University’s Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems in conjunction with Portland State University’s Planning Oregon/Institute for Metropolitan Studies, and with Rogue Farm Corps, a non-profit striving to train the next generation of farmers, particularly those who weren’t born to the farm or ranch.

Nellie McAdams, director of Rogue Farm Corps’ farm preservation program and one of the report’s co-authors, said bigger farms under fewer owners is a likely outcome of the coming ownership turnover. While farm size is not a problem by itself, she said, consolidation could result in fewer operators and less diversity in crop decisions and farming methods. With larger parcels, ownership becomes an even greater cost leap for beginning farmers, she said.

In addition to rising land costs, other hurdles for new farmers include the high cost of getting started, low income during a farm’s “formative years,” a lack of training opportunities for those without a farming background and “systemic barriers” that exclude “the growing pool of women and people of color who are eager to farm.”

The potential impact of older farmers letting go of land isn’t a new topic — the question of “Who are the next farmers?” is closely related — but the researchers took deeper dives than most into farmland transition.

To verify findings, the authors used USDA data, interviewed farmers, Realtors and others, and went through sales and property tax records.

From 2010 through 2015, 25 to 40 percent of farmland sales in Washington, Benton, Clackamas, and Polk counties were to business entities. Ten to 15 percent of farm sales in those counties involved out-of-state buyers.

Meanwhile, land prices are increasing. The average estimated market value of an acre of farmland with buildings in 2012 was \$1,882, compared to \$1,534 in 2002, according to the Census of Agriculture. “Realtors and land seekers are seeing much higher land prices, especially for irrigated land near urban areas and along transportation corridors,” the researchers concluded.

McAdams, of Rogue Farm Corps, said there’s evidence to suggest farmers themselves aren’t prepared for the turnover. Instead of being incorporated or formed as LLCs, 84 percent of Oregon farms are listed as sole proprietorships, the simplest and cheapest form of business organization. But it means the farm is tied to an individual, which can complicate succession, McAdams said.

The statistic “suggests that the vast majority of Oregon farmers may not have created thorough plans to smoothly transfer their businesses and assets to the next generation,” the report said. The authors concluded that land-sharing models, farm conservation easements, working lands easements, and other creative leasing arrangements may lead to better outcomes both for retiring farmers and those looking for a foothold in the profession.



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