

# WSU wolf researcher defends remarks as school probes how he made them

## Rancher disputes scientist's findings

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — A Washington State University wolf scientist defended his recommendation last week to further limit lethal control of wolves, as the school's administration sought to distance the university from his remarks.

Robert Wielgus, director of WSU's Large Carnivore Conservation Lab, has angered livestock producers before with his statements, including his claim that shooting wolves leads to more attacks on livestock, a conclusion rejected by a later study by the University of Washington.

Wielgus last week issued a "press release" as a "private citizen," recommending the state Department of Fish and Wildlife withhold lethal control of wolves on public lands if a rancher hasn't involved the state in preventing depredations.

He said in an interview with the Capital Press that he would have preferred sending the press release through university channels, but he was barred. He said it was important to present his findings before WDFW's Wolf Advisory Group met this week to set a lethal-control policy for the upcoming grazing season.

"I was charged by the state Legislature and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to conduct research and provide recommendations," he said. "I'm not a wolf advo-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Washington State University wolf scientist Robert Wielgus, shown here in 2012 at a research center in Pullman, is defending his email suggesting that ranchers be required to sign up with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to pursue non-lethal means of protecting livestock before shooting predators will be considered.

cate. Science is my religion. I simply report the data and make recommendations based on the data."

Ron Mittelhammer, dean of the College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Resources Sciences, noted last week that Wielgus used the university email system to distribute his press release and included his title and college contact information.

Mittelhammer said the university is investigating whether Wielgus misused public

resources to express his private opinion and whether he violated a policy prohibiting university employees from lobbying.

"It's under review. The entire issue is under review," Mittelhammer said. "I don't know how long it will take, but it's a priority."

The university has been receiving a lot of complaints about Wielgus' comments, Mittelhammer said. "We're hearing it from everyone."

In the press release, Wiel-

gus restated his position that a ranch put cows in harm's way last summer in the Colville National Forest. Wolves attacked the livestock, and WDFW shot seven wolves to stop the depredations.

Wielgus made the same claim in August, and WSU administrators responded by calling his account of events "inaccurate and inappropriate."

Although Wielgus didn't name the ranch in his latest remarks, he was clearly refer-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press  
Ron Mittelhammer, dean of the Washington State University's College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Resources Sciences, talks during a break of a meeting of the Department of Fish and Wildlife's Wolf Advisory Group March 29 in Olympia.

ring to the Diamond M Ranch. Wielgus stated the ranch concentrated livestock and placed salt blocks near the Profanity Peak pack den.

Diamond M Ranch co-owner Justin Hedrick said March 31 that he found the den many weeks into the grazing season. By then, the depredations already had started, he said.

He said the ranch has been putting salt blocks in the same spot since 1949.

Hedrick said the ranch lost about 75 head of cattle, including some far from the den. He said depredations are a natural consequence of a growing population of wolves on grazing allotments, not the lack of a formal agreement

with the state to prevent depredations.

"It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when packs turn to beef," Hedrick said. "This guy (Wielgus) needs to be labeled as absolutely anti-farmer, anti-rancher."

Wielgus said that he's working on a paper in which he hopes to show that if ranchers follow WDFW depredation-prevention agreements, wolves will attack fewer livestock.

"What I'm saying is they should abide by the terms," he said. "I haven't proven that statistically, but all indications are that's probably the case."

The agreements require ranchers to disclose information about the number of animals they have and where they will graze. WDFW has access to the property.

About 50 ranchers statewide have signed up, making them eligible for public funding to employ preventive measures and additional compensation for losses.

Hedrick said he doesn't blame ranchers for signing out of financial necessity, but his family won't.

"You're saying you're fine with wolves eating your cattle, as long as I get paid. Well, we don't want to raise cattle to feed wolves," Hedrick said. "I don't want anything I can't earn. I don't want handouts."



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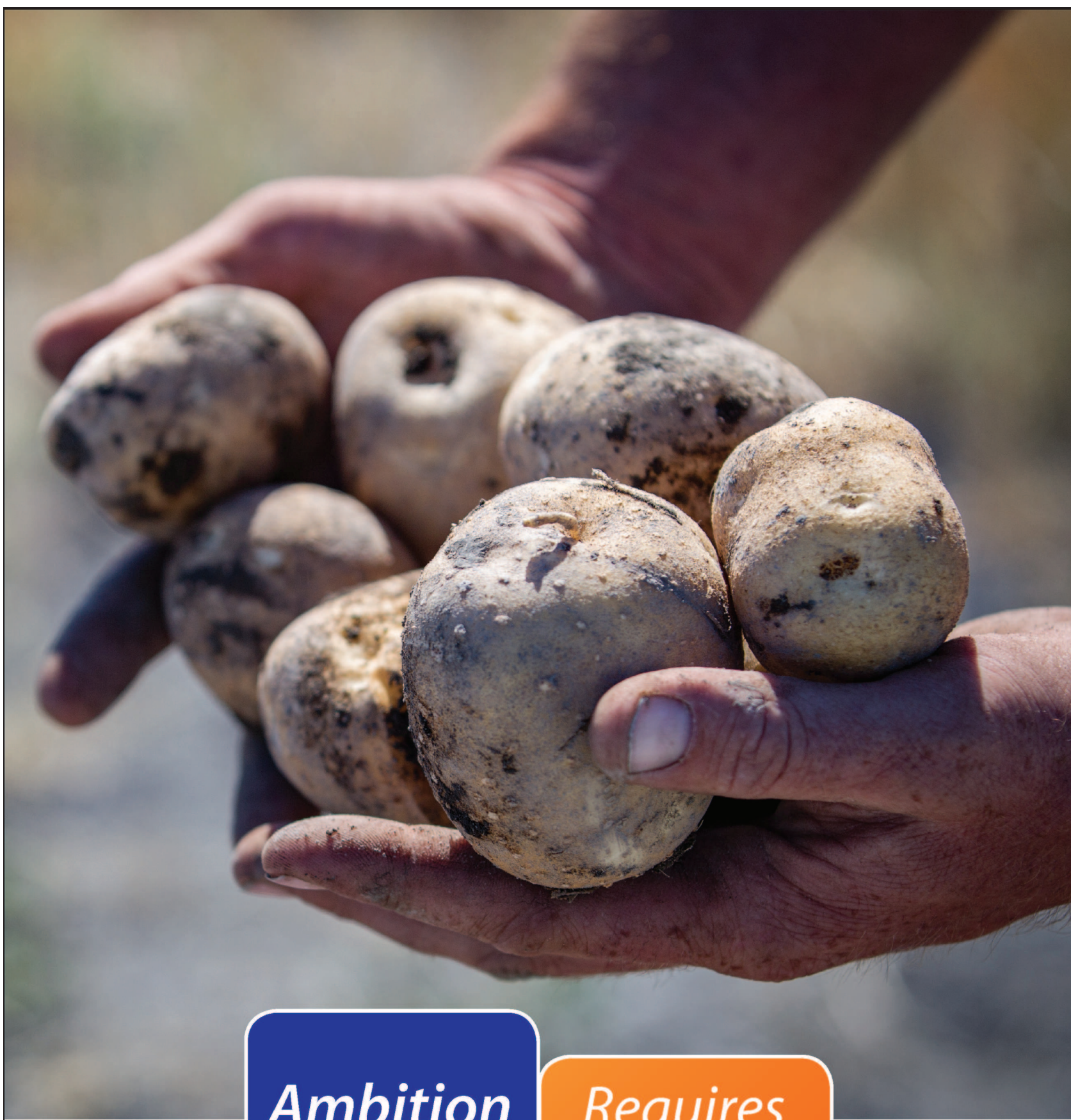
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