

WDFW tried more range-riders before shooting wolves

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington killed two wolves in June after an influx of range-riders couldn't stop the Togo pack from attacking more calves, according to Fish and Wildlife reports released June 29.

Adding more state-funded range-riders from two organizations was a last-stand tactic to discourage a pack with a long history of preying on cattle in Ferry County.

Fish and Wildlife employees in May agreed that wolves likely would attack more calves, but disagreed on whether to cull the pack. Instead, the department deployed more range-riders.

When wolves mauled two calves in June, Fish and Wildlife Director Kelly Susewind approved a recommendation from Regional Director Steve Pozzanghera to remove up to two wolves.

"Unfortunately, even with these additional reactive non-lethal deterrence measures, these latest depredations have occurred," Pozzang-



WDFW
A wolf in the Togo pack in Ferry County in northeast Washington.

hera told Susewind in an email June 13.

By the end of the week, the department had removed two of the pack's seven adults. The pack has an unknown number of pups.

Fish and Wildlife released the reports in response to a records request from the Capital Press. The reports provide details on the department's thinking in May and June as the Togo pack renewed its attacks on cattle.

Department staff initially met May 23 to discuss whether to shoot a wolf or two to teach the others to stay away from cattle.

The pack's size was a concern for wildlife managers. It had grown from three wolves in 2021 to seven wolves in 2022 and needed more protein.

Besides killing or injuring calves, the pack was causing other problems for ranchers. Wolves chased an entire pasture of cattle

through a barbed-wire fence.

The department's report notes that three ranchers in the Togo pack territory were trying to prevent the attacks.

Ranchers tried flashing lights, motion-activated alarms and electronic ear tags to keep track of cattle. Brush ripped off most ear tags and damaged cattle's ears, one rancher reported.

Fish and Wildlife set out to shoot at least one Togo pack wolf last summer. It failed, but the pack moved away from cattle, according to the department.

Once the attacks started again in May, some Fish and Wildlife staff argued that unless the department acted quickly, predations would escalate to the point where all seven wolves would have to be killed.

Other staff, however, wanted to try more range-riders and see if the attacks were reduced.

Some also discounted a rancher's contribution to protecting his cattle because he didn't report the exact times and locations of his movements in pastures, as is required of

state-paid range-riders.

Without a staff consensus on using lethal control, Pozzanghera recommended holding off on shooting wolves. Susewind agreed.

Fish and Wildlife added flashing lights to a pasture and adjusted a radio collar on one wolf to get more signals each day on the pack's whereabouts.

But the focus was on range-riding, the department's No. 1 non-lethal deterrent.

In coordination with Fish and Wildlife, the Cattle Producers of Washington added a full-time range-rider to the half-time range-rider it had in the area in May.

The Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative added a full-time and second half-time range-riders to the area.

Range-riders shifted their schedules because wolf activity increased in the late mornings and afternoons.

Range-riders checked pastures for a total of 11 hours on the day the Togo pack killed a calf June 8. The department staff reconvened to again consider lethal control.

Federal land managers face lawsuit over River Democracy Act records

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Federal land managers are facing a lawsuit alleging they've violated the Freedom of Information Act by failing to timely release documents about the controversial Rivers Democracy Act.

Nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon would be federally designated as "wild and scenic" under the bill, which critics fear would restrict logging and grazing, among other activities.

The legislation was introduced by Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, who claim the bill would shield property rights from adverse effects while tripling the number of river miles with "wild and scenic" protections in the state.

Federal land managers testified about the bill before a congressional sub-

committee last year, which prompted a FOIA request from the Western Resources Legal Center, a legal education nonprofit.

"To date, we have not been provided with any information and therefore resorted to legal recourse under the Freedom of Information Act," said Caroline Lobdell, the organization's executive director.

"The public should not have to wait for the proposed permanent designations to occur before they are allowed to understand the legislation," she said in an email.

Testimony at the hearing indicated government officials have an "enhanced understanding of the process, basis, and potential impacts" of adding waterways to the Wild and Scenic River System, according to the legal center's lawsuit.

For example, the testi-



EO Media Group File
Land surrounding northeast Oregon's Imnaha River would be affected if the waterway is designated as "wild and scenic" under the proposed River Democracy Act. A legal education nonprofit has filed a lawsuit seeking federal records pertaining to the bill.

mony included information about how many river miles and surrounding acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management would be affected by the bill.

The hearing revealed that government officials "spent significant time analyzing" the legislation's "effect and methods of enforcement," including the need to develop "comprehensive river man-

agement plans" that guide how it would be implemented, according to the legal center.

The legal center wants to access that information to better explain the River Democracy Act to the public and its constituents, such as farmers and ranchers, who may "rely on public lands for their livelihood."

In late October and early November of 2021, the center submitted FOIA requests for records pertaining to the River Democracy Act, including congressional communications related to the hearing.

No determinations regarding the FOIA requests have yet been made by the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management or their government overseers — the USDA and Interior Department — even though legally mandated deadlines have passed, the complaint said.

In light of the "months-

long delay" and "lack of communication," the plaintiff believes the government "seeks to hide records from the public" regarding its interpretation of the bill, the complaint said.

The federal agencies had not yet responded to requests for comment about the lawsuit as of press time.

The River Democracy Act has "significant implications" for managing roughly 3 million acres of "fire prone forests" in the state, and it stands to reason that government officials testified "based on information, data, and analysis provided to them," Lobdell said.

"We would like to see that information so that Oregonians can understand the implications for management of the proposed lands and resulting impacts to Oregonians and the public so they can meaningfully engage in the process," she said.



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