

ODFW Commission Hears Wolf Report

Draft revised Wolf Plan available for review, Commission to consider at June 7 meeting in Salem

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) heard the Wolf Conservation and Management Program Annual Report at their Commission meeting in St. Helens on April 19, 2019. The report was presented by Roblyn Brown, ODFW's Wolf Program Field Coordinator.

Brown reported that the minimum known count of wolves in Oregon at the end of 2018 was 137, a 10% increase from 2017. Brown said 16 packs were documented, with 15 of those containing breeding pairs, a 36% increase from 2017. A pack is defined as four or more wolves traveling together in winter. In addition eight groups of two or three wolves were identified. Wolves were discovered in the central Oregon Cascade Mountains in Douglas and Lane counties in late 2018. Wolves in Oregon have increased from less than 20 in 2009 to the current number of 137.

ODFW monitored 27 radio-collared wolves, including 14 that were captured and collared in 2018. Seven wolf mortalities were documented in 2018, including six that were human caused.

ODFW received 71 requests from livestock producers to investigate dead or injured livestock suspected to be wolf depredation. Of those investigations, 28 were confirmed as wolf caused, compared to 17 in 2017. The Oregon Department of Agriculture's compensation program awarded grants of \$160,890 to 10 counties in 2018. Funds were used for non-lethal preventive measures and for direct payment for confirmed depredations to livestock producers.

Wolves living west of Oregon Highways 395/78/95 (Phase 1) continue to be listed as Endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. In Oregon the Fish and Wildlife Commission removed wolves from the Endangered list. A lawsuit was filed by three environmental groups challenging the delisting decision and the case is still pending. Wolves are protected statewide as a special status game mammal and managed under the Wolf Plan. Wolves in central Oregon (Phase 2) and eastern Oregon (Phase 3) are managed with a continuing emphasis on non-lethal deterrents to reduce livestock depredation, the use of controlled take in certain situations, and the permitting of additional agencies to investigate

wolf depredations of livestock.

ODFW has released its draft proposed update to the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, available for review at www.odfw.com/wolves.

The Commission is expected to vote on the Plan at its June 7 meeting in Salem.

Once adopted, the Plan will be the third edition of the Wolf Plan, which was first adopted in 2005 after an extensive public process and revised in 2010.

The proposed Draft Plan was written by staff but involved extensive meetings with stakeholders and public comment at several prior Commission meetings. In 2018, the Commission also directed ODFW staff to host facilitated meetings with stakeholders to seek consensus on unresolved issues.

The Draft Plan incorporates ideas where consensus was reached, but agreement was not possible on all topics. See a report on the facilitated meetings' outcomes at <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/WPSR.asp>.

"Wolf management is a polarizing topic with strong views on all sides, so it's tough to find consensus," says Derek Broman, ODFW carnivore and furbearer program coordinator. "But regardless of people's views on wolves, the wolf population in Oregon is growing in size, number of packs, and packs reproducing, while expanding its range."

Defining chronic depredation that might lead to lethal control of wolves and hunting of wolves are some

of the most contentious issues. Staff previously proposed the definition of chronic depredation be three confirmed depredations in a 12-month period in Phase 2 and 3, a change from the cur-



rent definition (two confirmed depredations in an unlimited time frame). Due to feedback from stakeholders at the facilitated meetings, the Draft Plan now proposes two confirmed depredations in nine months in Phases 2 and 3 (so the only change from the current definition is a 9-month time restriction).

Like the original Plan, the Draft Plan would allow controlled take only in Phase 3 (currently eastern Oregon) in instances of recurring depredations or when wolves are a major cause of ungulate populations not meeting established management objectives or herd management goals.

ODFW is not proposing any controlled take of wolves at this time, but believes regulated hunting and trapping needs to remain a tool available for wolf management. Any proposal for

controlled take of wolves would require Commission approval through a separate planning and hunt development process.

Other major topics addressed in the Draft Plan include:

- Wolf-livestock conflict, including an expanded section on the latest non-lethal tools and techniques for reducing conflict.
- Wolf interactions with native ungulate populations, including annual ungulate population estimates before and after wolf establishment. Elk, wolves' primary prey, have increased in some units with wolves, and decreased in others. However, interpretation of the impact of wolf predation on elk is confounded by management efforts to reduce elk numbers in units where they are over management objective or to minimize conflicts with elk on private land. Mule deer have been below desired levels for more than two decades, before wolves' return to Oregon, with changing land management strategies, invasive weeds, and recent severe weather among the main reasons for their decline.
- Wolf population monitoring and potential conservation threats.
- Strategies to address wolf-human interactions.

Public testimony on the Draft Plan will be taken during the June 7 meeting and can also be sent to odfw.commission@state.or.us. Emails sent by May 23 will be included with staff proposal as part of the review materials shared with Commissioners prior to the meeting.

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