Oregon wolf population growth slows; mortalities rise

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on Tuesday, April 19, 2022, released its annual wolf report and found 175 wolves lived in the state in 2021, just two more than in 2020.

SALEM — Oregon's wolf population increased by just two individuals in 2021, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, while the number of wolf deaths was the highest yet in a single year.

ODFW released its annual wolf report on Tuesday, April 19, documenting 175 wolves compared to 173 in 2020. The count is a minimum estimate based on verified evidence, such as wolf sightings, tracks and remote camera photographs.

A total of 26 wolves died in 2021, including 21 killed by humans. Of those, four were hit by vehicles, eight were illegally poisoned, one was legally shot by a rancher on private property and another eight were killed by ODFW after habitually preying on livestock.

Roblyn Brown, ODFW wolf program coordinator, said last year's rise in mortalities "certainly played a role" in the latest population survey remaining mostly flat.

"Despite this, we are confident in the continued health of the state's wolf population as they expand in distribution across the state and show a strong upward population trend," Brown said in a statement.

Environmental groups argued the report shows Oregon's wolf population is in crisis due to poaching and other human-caused mortality.

Danielle Moser, wildlife program coordinator for Oregon Wild, said the deaths reported by ODFW are "only known mortalities and there are certainly many more unaccounted for deaths and poaching of uncollared wolves."

Zoe Hanley, Northwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife, said the group is concerned Oregon's wolf recovery is not adequately addressing threats like poaching.

"This year's report is a call to action for agencies like (ODFW) and Oregon State Police to recognize the severity of poaching incidents and take additional steps to protect Oregon's vulnerable wolves," Hanley said.

John Williams, wolf committee co-chairman for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association based in Enterprise, said he was surprised by the wolf population being mostly unchanged, considering ranchers are seeing wolves in areas where they've never seen them before.

"We know their areas are expanding. We know the numbers are expanding," Williams said.

Most wolves in Oregon inhabit the far northeast corner of the state, though they are branching into new territory. ODFW established four new areas of resident wolf activity in 2021, covering parts of Grant, Jefferson, Klamath and Union counties.

The state now has 21 known wolf packs — 16 of which qualify as breeding pairs — in addition to eight other groups of two or three wolves.

Wolves also continued to prey on livestock in 2021. ODFW confirmed 49 cases of wolf depredation, up from 31 in 2020. In all, wolves killed or injured 95 animals, including six cows, 44 calves, 17 ewes, 11 lambs, 14 goats and three guard dogs.

The vast majority, 92%, of those depredations occurred between July and November, with 86% on private land and 14% on public land.

Williams said wolves are becoming an increasing problem for ranchers across the state, with the impacts extending beyond killed or injured livestock to lower birth rates for cows and lower birth weights for calves. He urged the state to take a more proactive approach to managing the predators.

"The rancher is taking the brunt of it," Williams said. "It is becoming one of the major expenses for the producer."

Between August and October, ODFW killed eight members of the Lookout Mountain pack in Baker County after wolves repeatedly attacked cattle.

Under Phase III of the Oregon Wolf Management Plan, wolves can be killed east of highways 395, 78 and 95 if they meet the state's "chronic depredation" threshold of two confirmed depredations in nine months.

Ranchers must first be using nonlethal deterrents and remove all potential wolf attractants in order for an incident to qualify toward lethal removal.

Western Oregon wolves were restored to the federal endangered species list following a court ruling earlier this year.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture's wolf compensation program awarded $130,814 in grants to 10 counties in 2021, which helps pay for nonlethal deterrents and provides direct payment for ranchers covering dead and missing livestock.

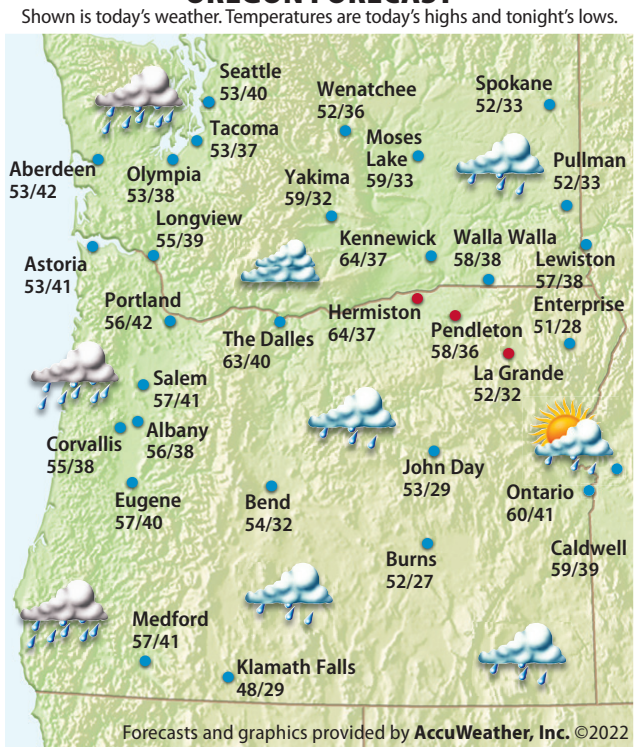
Forecast for Pendleton Area

AccuWeather | Go to AccuWeather.com

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Mostly cloudy with a shower	Considerable cloudiness	Mostly sunny	Partly sunny	Mostly cloudy
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
58° 36°	59° 41°	61° 40°	67° 43°	67° 45°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
64° 37°	65° 44°	66° 41°	69° 45°	69° 48°

OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather, Inc.** ©2022

ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	59°	31°
Normals	64°	40°
Records	92° (1934)	18° (1927)

PRECIPITATION	
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	0.95"
Normal month to date	0.89"
Year to date	4.55"
Last year to date	3.34"
Normal year to date	4.96"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	59°	31°
Normals	68°	39°
Records	90° (1934)	22° (1931)

PRECIPITATION	
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	1.08"
Normal month to date	0.52"
Year to date	3.03"
Last year to date	1.73"
Normal year to date	3.29"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Fri.
Boardman	WSW 7-14	WSW 4-8
Pendleton	W 7-14	W 7-14

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	5:59 a.m.
Sunset tonight	7:49 p.m.
Moonrise today	1:16 a.m.
Moonset today	9:25 a.m.

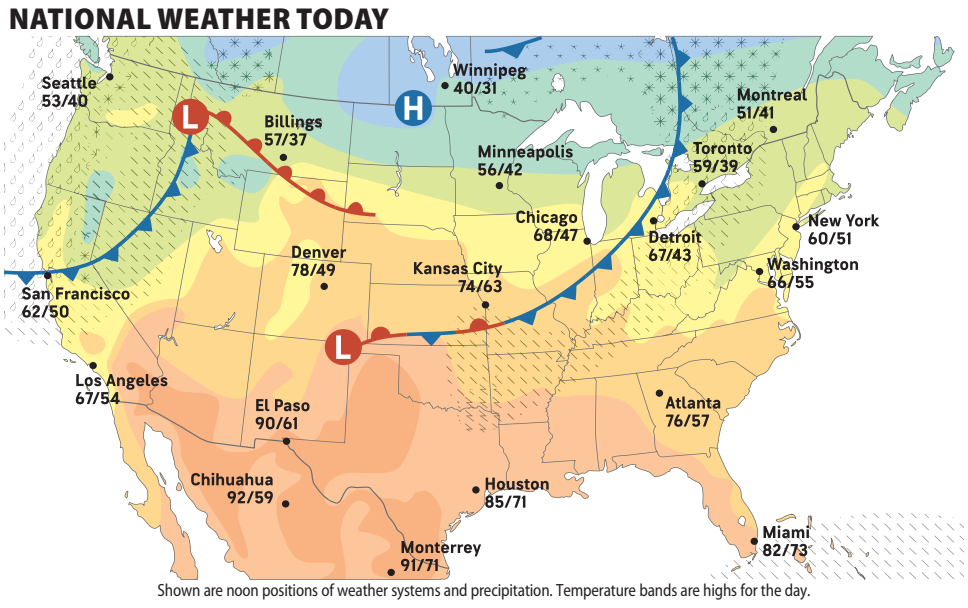
Last	New	First	Full
Apr 23	Apr 30	May 8	May 15

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 100° in Vernon, Texas **Low** 9° in Northome, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

Missing Enterprise man found dead in submerged vehicle in Wallowa Lake

Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA LAKE — A 26-year-old Enterprise man was found dead in his vehicle — which had been recovered from Wallowa Lake — on Friday, April 15.

The body of Devin Nelson Woempner-Velarde was found in the passenger area of a gold-colored 1999 Toyota Camry, according to a Wallowa County Sheriff's Office press release April 18.

Woempner-Velarde — and his vehicle — had been reported missing since April 11.

The Camry's location was reported to Wallowa County dispatch shortly after noon on April 15. A caller reported the vehicle was in the lake at Wallowa Lake State Park off the boat ramp, the sheriff's office reported. The Wallowa County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police responded, and, with the help of state park staff and an underwater camera, found the vehicle submerged roughly 40 feet from the boat ramp.

Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish said April 19 it appears Woempner-Velarde drove off the ramp, and likely before April 15. The boat ramp was "covered with snow" that was reported as not having tracks in it when the vehicle was located.

"The ignition was on and the car was in drive," Fish said. "It looks like he drove off."

The sheriff added the cause of death, "appears to be drowning, (but) the medical examiner hasn't finished a death certificate yet."

Fish said park rangers reported seeing a gold-colored car at the park April 11 or 12, but were not certain if it was Woempner-Velarde's vehicle.

More members of WCSO, along with the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, responded to help remove the vehicle from the lake with the use of a tow truck. Joseph Fire and Wallowa Memorial Hospital EMS also responded.

IN BRIEF

Baker Tower to provide short-term rental housing

Ian Crawford/Baker City Herald

Patrick Rhea, who owns the Baker Tower, plans to transform unused office space on the fifth floor of the 10-story building into short-term rental housing.

BAKER CITY — The owner of the Baker Tower, also known as Hotel Baker, plans to turn unused office space on the fifth floor of the 10-story structure into short-term rental housing.

Patrick Rhea, who owns the historic building at the northwest corner of Main Street and Auburn Avenue, said he's renovating the space to meet residential standards.

Rhea said he's aware a recent post on a local Facebook group, along with comments to it, raised the question of whether the space would be used as housing for homeless residents.

That's not the case, Rhea said, but the confusion seems to have stemmed from the term "transient lodging," which is in his application to the Baker City/County Planning Department, which department staff approved.

Transient is sometimes used as a synonym for homeless, but the word, when used to describe a type of housing or lodging, also means temporary quarters, including motel rooms.

The tax that guests in motels, bed and breakfasts and vacation rental homes pay is called the "transient lodging tax" in many jurisdictions, including Baker County.

The planning department approved Rhea's general proposal with a two-year timeline during which he would need to obtain a building permit and pay for city inspections before renting the residential spaces.

— EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

EAST OREGONIAN
— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays
EastOregonian.com
In the App Store:
EO EO E-EDITION
East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR. **Postmaster**: send address changes to East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801.
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