

Workshop focuses on wolf management

By George Plaven
East Oregonian



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Despite killing four wolves from the Imnaha Pack earlier this year for repeatedly attacking livestock, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife reiterated the value of non-lethal deterrents during a workshop Friday in Pendleton.

Eastern Oregon ranchers and county officials gathered at Blue Mountain Community College to hear presentations on the science and economics of dealing with wolves. The workshop featured speakers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services. ODFW also provided an update on the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, which is now up for review.

Roblyn Brown, the department's acting wolf program coordinator, said the wolf population is growing rapidly in Oregon — there were at least 110 wolves counted by the end of last year, compared to just 14 in 2009. Yet the number of confirmed attacks on livestock has stayed relatively flat, which Brown said is due in part to the use and effectiveness of non-lethal tools.

"We're figuring things out," Brown said. "Non-lethals can absolutely work in certain situations."

The most important thing,

Brown said, is for ranchers to make sure they clean up their bone piles to avoid attracting wolves onto their property in the first place. Things like fladry fencing, range riders, guard dogs and alarm boxes can be effective deterrents, at least temporarily, if they're used correctly.

Ranchers are doing a much better job now than they were when the plan was first implemented, Brown said. The number of confirmed wolf depredations was even down

slightly in 2015, compared to 2014. But non-lethals don't work every time, which is why Phase II of the wolf plan allows wildlife officials to selectively kill problem wolves.

In the case of the four Imnaha wolves, Brown said there were a number of factors that prompted ODFW to use lethal control. First, the wolves had apparently changed their behavior and started moving outside of their usual territory. Second, the group's alpha female had a back leg injury,

which could have prompted the group to target easier meals. Finally, non-lethal deterrents had proven ineffective in keeping wolves away from sheep and cattle.

Brown compared that to another series of attacks last year by the Mount Emily Pack on sheep in the Umatilla National Forest. All five of those incidents came against a single band of sheep, and by the time the producer asked for lethal control, Brown said non-lethal tools had started to

work. "ODFW will evaluate each situation when they're making a determination about when to go to lethal control," Brown said.

The agency's focus, however, continues to be on non-lethals first. With the evidence suggesting deterrents are effective, the workshop shifted to community-wide models for rural areas where wolves are re-established.

Suzanne Asha Stone, senior Northwest representative for the conservation group Defenders of Wildlife, pointed to a few successful programs across the West — most notably the Wood River Wolf Project in central Idaho, where there's the largest concentration of domestic sheep in the region.

Stone said the program pulls together ideas and funding from ranchers, agencies and wolf advocates alike to implement non-lethal solutions. More groups are starting to take this approach, she said, because it makes more resources more broadly available.

"The challenge is that it really requires a lot of good communication," Stone said.

Between 2008 and 2015, Stone said they've had anywhere from 10,000 to 23,000 sheep on the land, yet they've only lost 30 of the animals to

wolves over that period. "Some of our best solutions have come from that mix of people that don't usually talk to each other," she said.

Stone said she was encouraged by how county wolf committees were working together to ensure ranchers are compensated for dead or missing livestock due to wolves. Both Susan Roberts, of Wallowa County, and Jerry Baker, of Umatilla County, were on hand to discuss how their committees reach out to producers and submit applications for state grants.

Regardless of each individual's opinion on wolves, Roberts said they have learned to check their attitudes at the door. Producers, meanwhile, are getting better at documenting everything, which means they stand a better chance of getting a slice of the funds.

Baker also emphasized the need for ranchers to provide as much documentation as possible to the committee. He said the county has developed a positive relationship with ODFW, especially when it comes to implementing non-lethal deterrents.

"I know the range riders have helped a lot, if they're in the right place at the right time," said Baker, who himself is a livestock producer. "I think we're learning as we go."

State distributes wolf compensation funds

Wallowa County Chieftain

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has approved \$129,664 in funding to be distributed to 13 counties as

part of the Oregon Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance County Block Grant Program. Funds for 2016 have been distributed for actual livestock losses

or injuries caused by wolves, for missing livestock above the normal historical levels in areas of known wolf activity, for proactive efforts to prevent wolf and livestock interactions, and for county wolf program implementation.

According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon's 2015 wolf population increased 36 percent from the previous year to 110

wolves. Wallowa, Umatilla and Baker counties continued to experience the bulk of the state's wolf activity and have received \$101,953 — approximately 78 percent of the money awarded for 2016.

The state has paid 100 percent of the claims submitted to ODA tied to confirmed or probable livestock losses due to wolves. Livestock owners worked with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to document these losses. Payments are made on a reimbursement basis for depredations that occurred during the previous grant cycle. Wallowa, Klamath, and Umatilla were the only counties filing claims with ODA that experienced confirmed or probable livestock losses in the 2015 cycle. These three counties are being awarded \$10,614 to compensate affected ranchers for losses due

to death and/or injury. Wallowa County received \$3,887, Klamath County received \$3,796, and Umatilla County received \$2,931 for compensation.

Of the total funding provided by the block grants this year, \$71,500 — or 55 percent — is going toward proactive, non-lethal efforts to reduce conflicts between wolves and livestock. County-level advisory committees established by the grant program's legislation requested funds to undertake proactive conflict deterrence efforts. Historically, these deterrent techniques include one or more of the following activities:

- Reducing attractants—bone pile removal, carcass disposal sites
- Barriers—fencing, fladry, electrified fladry
- Human presence—range riders, herders
- Livestock protection

dogs and other guarding animals

- Alarm or scare devices— Radio-Activated-Guard (RAG) device, other light and sound making devices
- Hazing or harassment of wolves— loud noises, spotlights, or other confrontation with wolves
- Livestock management/husbandry changes— changing pastures, night feeding, reduced calving period, birthing earlier, changing herd structure
- Experimental practices— bio-fencing, belling cattle
- Public outreach/education for ranchers

A total of \$5,335 was awarded to nine counties to help with administrative costs.

The following is a list of the total awards made by ODA to counties as part of the Oregon Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance County Block Grant Program for the 2016 Grant Period:

- Umatilla, \$52,778
- Wallowa, \$26,887
- Baker, \$22,288
- Klamath, \$8,796
- Union, \$5,000
- Morrow, \$3,675
- Lake, \$3,000
- Crook, \$2,000
- Wasco, \$1,750
- Wheeler, \$1,250
- Sherman, \$1,250
- Malheur, \$495
- Jackson, \$495

The fund process remains available for counties to address depredations that occur in the future. In that event, livestock operators should submit claims to their local county wolf advisory committee.

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