

Finding common ground on wolf plan difficult

Second meeting slated Sept. 21

By George Plavin
For the Chieftain

It was a tale of two meetings in The Dalles as traditional adversaries sat down recently to find common ground within the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, now three years past due for an update.

Around the table, members of farming, ranching, environmental and hunting organizations laid out their objectives for the plan, which will guide wolf recovery across the state for the next five years.

Conversations were heated at times — especially while discussing the prospect of hunting wolves — but the group eventually reached some areas of compromise, and agreed to schedule a second meeting.

Deb Nudelman, a mediator with Kearns & West in Portland, was hired by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife to facilitate the talks. ODFW staff members, including Director Curt Melcher, were also on hand to listen.

Joining the work group were Todd Nash, with the Oregon Cattlemen's Association; Mary Anne Cooper, with the Oregon Farm Bureau; Rob Klavins, with Oregon Wild; Nick Cady, with Cascadia Wildlands; Jim Akenson, with the Oregon Hunters Association; Dave Wiley, with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation; Amaroq Weiss, with the Center for Biological Diversity; Quinn Read, with Defenders of Wildlife; and Amira Streeter, natural resources policy adviser to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

"I think it's a great group," Nudelman said. "Groups like



George Plavin/Capital Press

Todd Nash, a rancher and Wallowa County commissioner representing the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, speaks during a meeting in The Dalles to find common ground on an update to the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, while Quinn Read with Defenders of Wildlife and Amira Streeter, natural resources policy adviser to Gov. Kate Brown, listen.

this don't come together if it's easy. They come together because it's hard."

This is not the first time opponents have met face-to-face to talk about wolves. The Oregon Wolf Plan was first written by ODFW in 2005, and last updated in 2010. Environmental groups sued the department in 2011 to halt killing wolves that had preyed on livestock under Phase I of the plan, which resulted in a settlement in 2013 emphasizing non-lethal deterrents.

Since then, the Oregon wolf population has grown to a minimum of 124 animals, and the plan has progressed to Phase III in Eastern Oregon, allowing greater flexibility for ranchers and wildlife managers to consider killing so-called "chronic depredators." Wolves remain protected under the federal Endangered Species Act west of highways 395, 78 and 95.

ODFW was supposed to update the Wolf Plan again in 2015. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission decided to postpone its vote indefinitely in January so the agency could build a broader consensus among stakeholders.

The work group got the process started, though it nearly faltered out of the gate. After identifying numerous issues, the group attempted to debate the merits of killing wolves that repeatedly prey on livestock, which led to an uneasy dialogue that had Nudelman openly questioning whether to proceed.

Akenson, conservation director for the Oregon Hunters Association, said he believes hunting needs to be included in management of wolves.

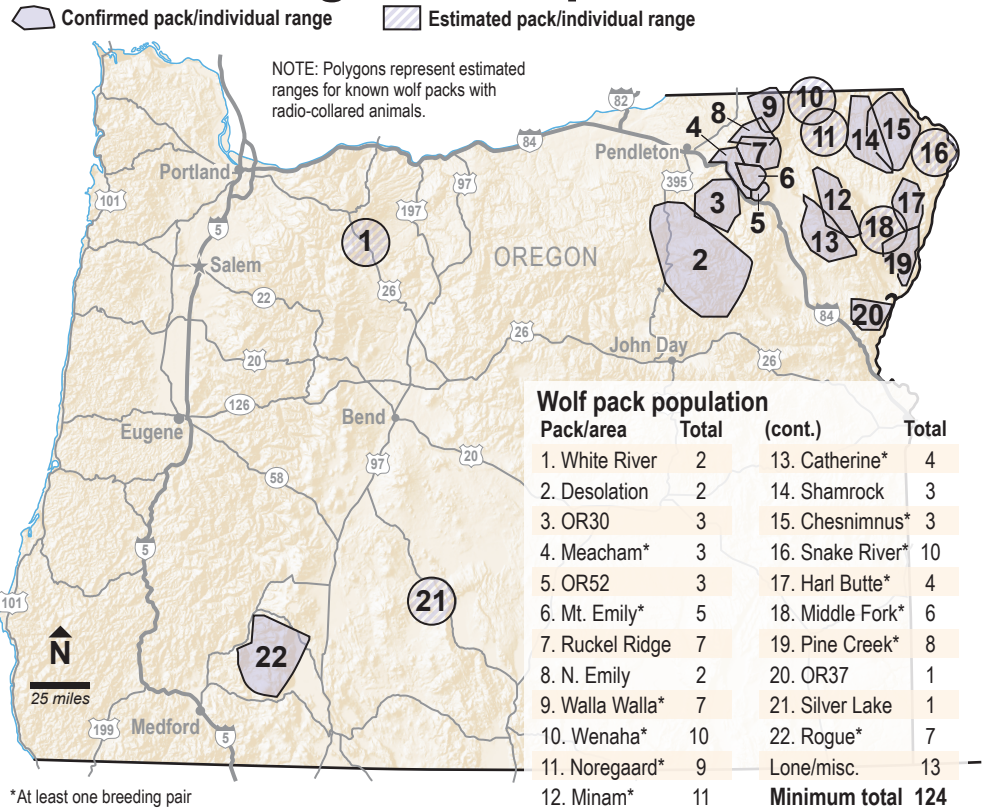
"The bottom line is, hunters need to be part of the process," Akenson said. "It's a real need."

Nash, a Wallowa County commissioner and longtime rancher, said livestock producers never wanted to kill wolves in the first place, but are in a predicament now where they must protect their livelihood.

"There isn't a class of livestock out there that is safe anymore," he said. "Lethal take in the remote areas where we run (livestock) is sometimes the only conclusion we can come to."

Klavins, northeast Oregon field coordinator for Ore-

Known Oregon wolf packs (As of Dec. 2017)



Source: Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

gon Wild, fired back at the notion of hunting wolves. Adding hunting into the Wolf Plan would be troublesome, he said, and might actually backfire when it comes to protecting livestock.

He referred to research that suggests killing wolves actually increases the odds of future attacks, because it disrupts the social structure of packs.

"We're not trashing hunting," Klavins said. "We are expressing serious concerns about hunting."

Weiss, the West Coast wolf advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity, said hunting wolves in the lower 48 states is not being done for subsistence, and decried it as a "waste of wildlife."

Having reached an impasse, the group shifted gears to focus

on collaring wolves with GPS tracking collars, and using the data to alert ranchers when wolves are in the area.

The cattlemen's association has called for making sure at least one wolf from every pack in the state is wearing a collar. But Roblyn Brown, wolf program coordinator for ODFW, said it is nearly impossible for staff to find and safely collar certain wolves in densely forested habitat.

ODFW also estimates collaring costs about \$2,000 to \$7,000 per wolf, with an average lifespan of 18 months per collar.

"It's just a tough thing to do," Brown said.

Nash said ranchers need to know where wolves are moving to make the most effective use of range riders and other nonlethal deterrents. Rather than provide specific GPS points of where wolves have been, Brown said it may be more effective to use the data as a whole, coloring a picture of where wolves are most

active — what wildlife officials call the "blue blob."

Despite concerns about whether the data would be used to poach wolves, Klavins said GPS collars may be one area where environmental groups may be willing to make a compromise.

With that bit of progress, the work group decided it would be worth it to meet again on Sept. 21 in Redmond.

Derek Broman, state carnivore biologist for ODFW, said the tentative plan is to go back before the Fish and Wildlife Commission in October to receive further direction.

"We know there's not going to be unanimous decisions," Broman said. "That's ultimately why this process is so valuable."

Melcher, the ODFW director, said he is an "eternal optimist," and believes the collaboration will prove to be a positive investment.

"We're writing the checks, and we're happy to keep doing it," Melcher said.

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Easy Baked Lasagna

- 25oz frozen cheese ravioli (keep the pasta frozen)
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 2 cups spaghetti sauce
- parmesan cheese, to taste

- Preheat your oven to 400 degrees.
- Pour 1 cup of the spaghetti sauce into the bottom of a 9x13 dish. Layer with half of the frozen ravioli & half of the mozzarella cheese.
- Layer the other half of the frozen ravioli, remaining cup of spaghetti sauce, & remaining cup of mozzarella cheese over top. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese.

Bake, covered with aluminum foil, for 30 minutes. Remove tin foil & continue to cook for 10-15 minutes. Sometimes I will turn the oven up to broil at the very end for a minute to brown the top a little bit more, but that's not necessary.

Yield: 6 servings.

Building Healthy Families urges you to participate in Family Meal Night as often as possible!