

# Oregon wolf population growth slows; mortalities rise

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon's wolf population increased by just two individuals in 2021, according to the state 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 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



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo, File  
**About 175 wolves live in Oregon, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife says.**

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 Look-out 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 non-lethal 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 non-lethal deterrents and provides direct payment for ranchers covering dead and missing livestock.

"After a calm spring with few incidents, we saw a much higher number of depredations from July through November despite livestock producers' extensive non-lethal efforts to reduce conflict," Brown said. "We thank all producers who have taken preventative measures and encourage all those in areas with wolves to reach out for assistance."

Brown did express concern about an uptick in poaching that included the poisoning of eight wolves, including all five members of the Catherine pack in Union County, in 2021.

So far in 2022, three wolves have also been poached in northeast Oregon. All cases are being investigated by the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division.

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