

Wolves:

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compensation program for the two ewes and one lamb confirmed as wolf kills.

She said the agency also recommends producers employ nonlethal means to ward off wolves.

“This location is outside the large area of known wolf activity for Northeast Oregon, so if the producer hasn’t been doing so already, they will want to start to implement or improve upon nonlethal tools to reduce future conflict,” she said.

Investigations

Dennehy said in an email that ODFW routinely investigates reports from producers of depredations and an “experienced wildlife biologist and agency expert on depredation” investigate the reports. They look for evidences such as the type and depth of wounds from teeth, tracks and how the attacks compare with those of various predators, such as wolves, coyotes, bear and cougars.

In the April 29 attack on sheep, it was noted that the attacks on the ewes were inconsistent with coyote attacks and thus, attributed to wolves.

“The review focuses on whether the evidence collected supports the original determination that was made,” Dennehy said.

Since the review investigators made a different determination, the online report was updated.

Lethal take permits

Since the ODFW issued a kill permit for two wolves April 29 that’s good until May 24, one wolf was taken by an agent of Tom Birkmaier, the Crow Creek rancher who had lost several cattle to wolves. Birkmaier declined to identify the agent over concern pro-wolf advocates may harass him.

Dennehy said one more wolf can be taken from the two pastures designated as zones permissible for wolf harvest.

“Lethal take permits are meant to give livestock producers an additional tool to deal with a conflict on their own,” she said. “An added benefit of this tool is the increased pressure and human presence it brings, which may also help prevent chronic depredation.”

However, it doesn’t always work and sometimes the removal of an entire pack is necessary to stop chronic depredation.

“Incremental take (taking a few wolves rather than an entire pack) is a tool the agency uses to balance the conservation of wolves with the need to address chronic depredation,” she said. “Sometimes it succeeds in significantly slowing or stopping chronic depredation, and sometimes it doesn’t.”

She emphasized that ODFW will remove an entire pack when incremental take is insufficient.

“It’s called the ‘caught-

in-the-act rule.’ It gives (a producer) more flexibility,” she said, adding that even without a kill permit, “he still would have the caught-in-the-act (permission) anywhere he has his cattle.”

However, as Nash pointed out, ranchers are legally permitted to kill wolves caught harassing their livestock. Ever since 2015 when wolves were removed from the state’s endangered species list, ranchers on the east side of the state have been allowed to kill wolves harassing livestock.

The type of wolves now in Oregon are not native to the state, according to a report in the Bend Bulletin. The Great Plains wolf is the only wolf subspecies native to Oregon and that the Canadian timber wolf is the type of wolf now living in the state. It was reintroduced to the area of Yellowstone National Park in the mid-1990s and has since migrated to Oregon through Idaho. According to the ODFW website, the wolves captured in Canada and released in Central Idaho and Yellowstone were not released in Oregon.

Nash said ODFW should be conducting the lethal take, rather than leaving it up to the ranchers. All it

when they see things,” she said. “I suspect that if we did not have all the help that we would be experiencing more of a loss.”

Kelly Birkmaier said the actual financial cost to a rancher of the wolf predations is difficult to ascertain and the state’s wolf compensation fund does not adequately remunerate ranchers for their losses.

“How do you calculate all this cost?” she said. “At this point, with all the time people have been out here, (the cost) is way above and beyond what the state compensates you for.”

There’s also the cost in both the man hours spent guarding the cattle and the physical body stress on the animals caused by wolf predation.

“If you’re talking about all the people who’ve been helping Tom out, you’re probably talking 15 hours a day,” she said.

Depredations change behavior

The attacks by wolves effectively change the behavior of both predators and prey. As the OCA’s wolf committee co-chairman Williams said, when people are alarmed enough to go after

“THEY’RE ALL BUNCHING UP BECAUSE THEY’RE SCARED INSTEAD OF SPREADING OUT AND GRAZING.”

— Kelly Birkmaier, Crow Creek rancher

takes is two confirmed predations for the ODFW to agree to incremental take.

“Then you have, with the Birkmaiers, enough for ODFW to take effective management practices to stop the depredation and the onus has been put back on the rancher rather than ODFW taking action,” he said.

Producers have enough to do

As Birkmaier said, he’s spending all his time protecting his cattle when he should be doing other ranch chores — and spending time with his wife and children.

Late April and early May are generally the busiest time of year for a Wallowa County rancher, he said. There’s fences to repair and maintain, preparation for irrigation season and fieldwork. But he’s had to spend most of his time guarding his cattle against wolves.

“I bet in the past eight or nine days I’ve been with the cows 20 hours a day,” Birkmaier said May 3 — and little has changed since.

Kelly Birkmaier, Tom’s wife and partner in the ranch, said May 16 that she is not aware of any wolf attacks in the previous week. She said she believes that’s largely because of the assistance they have received from neighbors and fellow ranchers.

“A lot of that has had to do with people who’ve volunteered their time and energy and are reporting

the wolves, the predators simply move on to another area.

“With wolves, they’ll travel 60-70 miles a day. The scale of these animals is so incredible,” he said. “You don’t solve the problem; you just change who’s getting eaten.”

It also causes the cattle to be nervous and lose body weight.

“Over the past 10 days to two weeks, they’ve lost body condition score,” Tom Birkmaier said.

Body condition score is a method ranchers use to determine the health of their cattle. One point in body condition equals about 90 pounds, Williams said.

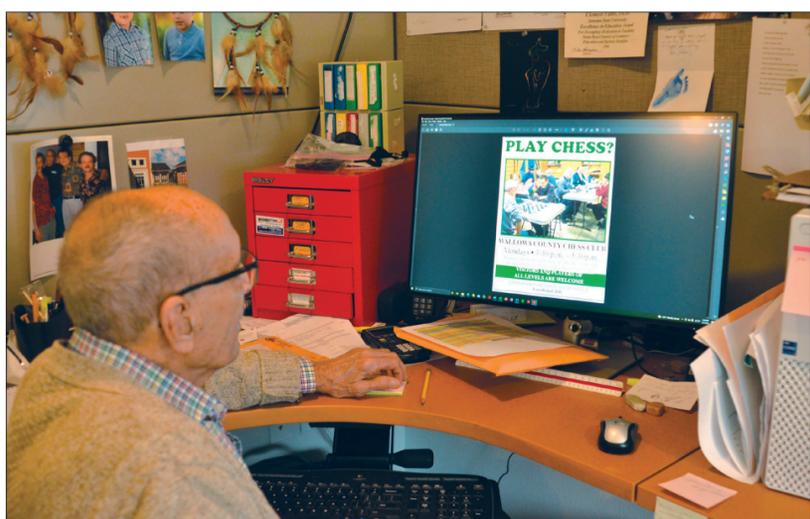
“When they’re nervous, they’re not going to breed,” he said.

Kelly Birkmaier said the cattle’s grazing patterns change, too, and they damage the ground they’re supposed to be grazing upon.

“They’re all bunching up because they’re scared instead of spreading out and grazing,” she said.

Tom Birkmaier also said the presence of wolves that makes his cattle nervous affects how they behave around other, less-threatening predators such as coyotes.

“I’ve never seen my cows this way,” he said. “Generally they ignore a coyote, now they panic and run. They go into full panic. ... Cattle this time of year ignore coyotes and coyotes ignore them.”



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain Clem Falbo of Joseph shows a poster he is creating to help revive a local chess club Tuesday, May 3, 2022. The club, Eastern Oregon’s oldest club, had been going since 2011 until the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to stop.

Chess:

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“We like to play the adults against the kids to teach them a little bit, and the kids can teach us a little bit,” he said.

Falbo also said the game teaches young players to follow rules and gives them a jumpstart into math and geometry through the visual anticipation of planning moves many steps ahead.

The club is designed more to teach the game than high-level play, but that doesn’t mean opportunities don’t occasionally present themselves.

“We had a grandmaster stop by one night and he played us all and beat us,” Falbo said.

Falbo played in enough tournaments over the years to earn a 1,600 or “B” rating, making him an above-average player. Grandmasters are rated 2,500 or above.

The Netflix series “The Queen’s Gambit” became a nationwide sensation when it was released in 2020 and sparked renewed interest in the game. For those wondering, Falbo favors the London System as his opening when playing the white chess pieces.

“Chess just needs publicity,” said Falbo, who called the series the best representation of chess he has seen on screen.

Locally, he hopes to continue adding members



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain Clem Falbo of Joseph shows one of the math textbooks he wrote Tuesday, May 3, 2022.

to the club, and is trying to put together tournaments and learning events to bring the game to more youth.

Math and chess

Falbo learned chess from his grandfather at 12, but developed the finer points of the game during his time in the Navy during the Korean War. He earned his Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Texas, Austin, and has written numerous books on mathematics. He also continues to write published papers on mathematics with the latest coming in 2021 in a British journal.

It is continued work in the field that keeps driving him daily even after being diagnosed with prostate cancer two years ago.

He taught mathematics — specializing in differential equations — in Cali-

fornia at Fresno State University and Sonoma State University, the latter stop for 35 years. He retired in 1999 and began working with his wife, Jean — also a chess player — in the U.S. Peace Corps teaching math in the African nation of Zimbabwe before coming to Joseph.

His love of mathematics translates to the chessboard and feeds his mind that has always hungered to find answers to tough questions.

“It is a thinking game and with every move you have to try to think of every possible outcome of that move,” he said. “I play positional chess and that appealed to me because what it amounted to was pattern identification. It is kind of like weather prediction because when you get a certain pattern you can predict things.”

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