

Killing of Idaho wolf pups provokes anger

Associated Press

BOISE — Conservation groups in Idaho are speaking out against the “inhumane” killings of eight wolf pups in the wild that were part of a Boise high school’s adopted wolf pack.

Following the killings, representatives from several Idaho groups in August sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack asking that he “immediately suspend the killing of wolf pups on all public lands by the USDA’s federal agents.” The U.S. Department of Agriculture responded last week by saying the agency works to find “practical, humane, effective and environmentally safe solutions to wildlife problems or conflicts,” but lethal measures can be necessary.

Advocates said they are shocked and upset the Biden administration would support

the killing of the pups, which they said came after complaints from a rancher.

“We are very concerned and believe that the Biden administration needs to step up and reinstate protection, because we know that Idaho, Montana and Wyoming are in an all-out frontal assault on wolves,” Dick Jordan, a former science teacher at Timberline High School and presidential science award recipient, told the Idaho Statesman.

“Something has to be done. It’s inhumane, it’s unethical and it’s not ecologically sound.”

In the original letter to the Biden administration — signed by representatives from a number of groups, including the International Wildlife Coexistence Network, Western Watersheds Project, Friends of Clearwater and the Center for Biolog-

ical Diversity — the groups said they were “dismayed” to learn the USDA’s Idaho Wildlife Services federal agents were involved in the killing of the pups.

They said wolves were already “under attack” in Idaho following legislation passed earlier this year that expanded opportunities to kill the animals. The bill removes the 15-per-year limit on hunting and trapping wolves, and allows the Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board to hire private contractors to kill wolves they believe are threats to livestock or wildlife.

“There is nothing biologically sound or socially acceptable about killing wolf pups on federal lands, especially when wolves are under significant eradication pressure,” the letter stated. “Wolf pups pose no threat to domestic livestock — in Idaho, or any-

where in the Western United States.”

In response, Jenny Lester Moffitt, the undersecretary for marketing and regulatory programs at the USDA, wrote a letter saying that Wildlife Services “prefers to use nonlethal methods.”

“However, in some situations — such as that in Idaho — it is necessary to use lethal control methods,” Moffitt said in the letter.

“While we understand your objections, it is important that our management professionals have access to all available tools to effectively respond to wildlife depredation. As such, we cannot stop using any legal, humane management options, including the lethal removal of juvenile wolves.”

The letter continued: “We assure you that WS personnel work carefully to remove

only those animals necessary to protect livestock, other agricultural resources, natural resources, human health and safety, or property.”

The eight young wolves were killed in Boise and Idaho counties, according to the letter, and in consultation with Idaho Fish and Game.

“WS determined that removing juvenile wolves would encourage adult wolves to relocate, thereby reducing the total number of wolves requiring removal,” Moffitt said in the letter.

Jordan said he was “blown away” by the administration’s response.

“It seems like the issue has become so political,” he said, “and (Biden) is just not making the right decisions.”

Michel Liao, a junior at Timberline High, said it’s frustrating to see federal officials say they’re doing

the best they can for wildlife when they’re “failing to see that wolves are so integral to our ecosystem.”

Timberline High — home of the Wolves — adopted the wolf pack in 2003 and had been tracking it since.

Liao is a member of the TREE Club at Timberline, an environmental club advocating to save the Timberline pack. The group has created “Save our T-Pack” pages on social media, where members have spoken out against the killing of the school’s pack members.

“They are justifying killing these wolf pups as a form of humane management even though these wolf pups pose no danger,” Liao told the Statesman. “It’s a very dangerous message for the federal government to support the killing of pups that can’t defend themselves.”

VISITORS

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the contract, were slated to discuss the two proposals during a meeting on Thursday, Oct. 14.

The county’s transient lodging tax committee, which advises commissioners, reviewed the two proposals on Oct. 7 and scored them based on the criteria in the Request for Proposals the county sent out in early September.

The committee gave the Anthony Lakes proposal a score of 98 points, and the Chamber of Commerce proposal a score of 96.

Anthony Lakes general manager Peter Johnson announced the withdrawal in a letter he emailed Wednesday afternoon, Oct. 13 to county commissioners.

“We have been persistent in seeing this process through with the goal of enhancing Baker County Visitor Ser-

vices to better serve our small communities,” Johnson wrote. “Unfortunately, actions and statements over the past few months and specifically this past week by Baker County and its affiliates has moved us to withdraw our proposal for Visitor Services. It has become evident that any contractual or other agreement or relationship with Baker County can only be considered a liability to ALORA and its enterprises.”

In a phone interview

Wednesday afternoon, Johnson declined to cite any specific actions or statements he referenced in his letter.

“We were 100 percent in until just a couple days ago,” he said.

Johnson said that although he “sees a lot of potential with the visitor center contract” and is confident that Anthony Lakes Outdoor Recreation Association would be able to accomplish all the tasks it laid out in its proposal, he is

concerned about “everyone working together to promote Baker County tourism and our small businesses.”

Johnson declined to be more specific.

He said he has offered the assistance of Anthony Lakes employees to the Chamber of Commerce.

“We want to do everything we can to help them,” Johnson said. “I’m not saying they need us to, but I want to have an open line of communication.”

A copy of Johnson’s letter to county commissioners is available at www.bakercity-herald.com.

County commissioner Mark Bennett said that although he can only speak for himself and not for the two other commissioners, Bruce Nichols and chairman Bill Harvey, he sees no reason, considering the lodging tax committee’s scoring, not to move forward and award the contract to the Chamber of Commerce.

TRAINS

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“My personal opinion whether I like the train whistle or not is completely irrelevant, it really is,” McQuisten said. “I am here to represent the will of the people as a whole and every time I ask or look at or do a straw poll or look at past election results, I get 80 to 85% of the community against this.”

Sells said that in the past two weeks she has seen 23 emails, most of them sent to all six councilors, and most from residents who support the quiet zone.

“The majority that I feel like I have received had been towards the supporting side,” Sells said.

Alderson said he doesn’t consider straw polls on Facebook an accurate reflection of residents’ feelings.

“A lot of people don’t have Facebook, a lot of people don’t invest themselves in it,” Alderson said.

Spriet contends the Facebook polls were clearly biased.

“I’m not saying that as a negative thing towards you, mayor, but it’s clear that you’ve been, whether it’s based on your experience or whatever, that you’ve been against the quiet zone since this kind of began,” Spriet said.

“I’m against going against the will of the people,” McQuisten said. “I would be for or against, depending on what the majority wanted.”

Spriet also said he believes that many people who participated in the poll didn’t have all the information that councilors do about what a quiet zone entails.

Spriet pointed out that the city doesn’t ask voters to

approve other safety-related things, such as installing a stoplight or putting in security cameras at city parks.

“We don’t vote on safety issues,” Spriet said. “That’s why we were elected, that’s why we’re here, that’s why we’re sitting in these seats. So, I think it’s the same sort of thing, it’s a safety issue. It is not a political issue. That’s why I’ve come to support it.”

Spriet emphasized that the citizens group has offered to raise money for the quiet zone improvements.

“This doesn’t cost the city any money,” Spriet said. “This council has voted to put in a street where there has not been a street before, to put in pavement where there wasn’t pavement before on a street in one of the more affluent portions of the city. People didn’t get to vote on that and it’s their money.”

McQuisten asked Fargo, who represented the citizens group during Tuesday’s meeting, why the group didn’t advocate for taking the quiet zone question to voters.

Fargo said it goes back to their discussion about the 2002 ballot measure, which asked voters to approve a city expenditure.

“So what we saw was an opportunity for the community to say we could do this together,” Fargo said. “And this is a good thing, that ensures the safety of our children, that’s something that’s sacred to everyone in this room. And it doesn’t matter how many people say they want horns to continue if we’re putting our children at risk on the playground.”

Dixon followed up McQuisten’s question, asking whether the quiet zone promoters are afraid of letting city voters decide the matter.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

About 20 freight trains on average pass through Baker City daily.

Fargo responded: “Let me just be direct — there are people in this community who are interested in selling fear, uncertainty and doubt about this community starting this project and we’re relying on you, as our elected representatives, to make the right call based on the facts that you’ve received here.”

Two officials from La Grande, which secured its

quiet zone designation in late December 2019, attended Tuesday’s meeting.

La Grande Mayor Stephen Clements, and Kyle Carpenter, the city’s public works director, talked about the process that city went through for the quiet zone.

In La Grande, the city paid for the improvements to railroad crossings, at a cost of more than \$200,000.

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