

Oregon wolf decision based on facts, not fears

Wolves are thriving across the West. In Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon they are becoming a fixture on the landscape. A wolf pack has even turned up in Northern California.

In that context, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission made a solid decision last week to take wolves off the state's endangered species list.

Four breeding pairs have been in Eastern Oregon for three consecutive years, as is required in the state wolf plan. Actually, the number of breeding pairs is nine, signaling that the population is far healthier than the wolf plan requires.

Add that to the fact that a minimum of 82 wolves are known to live in Eastern and Southwestern Oregon and there is little reason to worry about wolves disappearing. Their numbers have increased from 14 in 2009 to 82 this year.

And remember: Those are minimum numbers that wildlife managers have confirmed. The actual population may be far larger.

The criteria for delisting the wolf in Oregon were in the state's wolf management plan, which was the product of prolonged and public debate when it was written.

Now that wolves have met those criteria for delisting, some folks are looking for loopholes to back out of the plan.

They are way out of line.

First, wolves in the western two-thirds of the state remain protected just as they have been all along.

Only in the eastern one-third of the state, where all but seven of the wolves live, are they affected at all, by allowing wildlife managers more flexibility.

Second, Oregon ranchers,

who have been most affected by the return of wolves, have lived up to their part of the deal. They've done it in the face of a predator that as of the first of the year had killed 114 cattle, sheep and herding dogs and injured many more.

That is only the number of killings that wildlife managers confirmed. Last year, for example, 34 depredation investigations resulted in only 11 confirmed wolf kills.

Though ranchers are indemnified for their livestock, it doesn't repay them for the weight their other cattle lost because of wolves or the extra hours and effort required to protect against wolf attacks.

Third, the Endangered Species Act was aimed at protecting plants and animals that were in danger of extinction. Wolves do not fit in that category. They are robust predators that follow the food and do not need special treatment.

In fact, wolves were never reintroduced in Oregon or Washington state; they spilled over from Idaho and British Columbia, where the estimated wolf population is 10,000. More than 50,000 wolves live in Canada and 30,000 live in Alaska.

It defies logic to argue that the wolf is on the brink of extinction.

Yet earnest groups of activists insist that, somehow, wolves are getting short shrift in Oregon. Some are saying the state's biologists didn't jump through an adequate number of hoops before recommending that wolves be delisted. They say they might sue.

If they do, we'll know their concern isn't for wolves, which are continuing to thrive and multiply despite all of the fearful predictions activists have made over the years.



Wolf supporters use delisting as a means of fundraising

By Doug Whitsett
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

Some of the first governance meetings held in Oregon were convened in 1843, due to concerns over wolves killing livestock. It required more than 100 years of concerted effort before the last Oregon wolf was presented for bounty in 1946. Due entirely to their ill-advised reintroduction, the same issue is being actively debated today, more than 170 years after the first control efforts began.

Last week, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted 4-2 to delist the Canadian gray wolf from the state's endangered species list. The commission's decision came following an entire day of testimony.

People from throughout the state attended the meeting, including wolf advocates primarily from Portland and Eugene. Their perspective was countered by representatives of the Oregon Hunters Association, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and many other residents of Eastern Oregon. Recent commission appointee Jason Atkinson was once again absent from the proceedings.

The commission heard presentations from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's wolf program coordinator, as well as one of the program's original architects, a biologist who has since retired. The presentations included maps of the areas in which wolves are known to exist in Oregon. It clearly showed that the apex predators are found nowhere near Portland or Eugene, but largely in the northeastern part of the state.

The commission then began hearing arguments representing both sides of the issue including oral testimony from my office. We testified that according to recent press accounts, constituent operators of a century ranch located in northern Klamath County awoke on three consecutive mornings to find that wolves had maimed or killed their cattle. Also placed into the record by my office was written testimony provided by representatives of Oregon Wild and the Sierra Club during a meeting of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee last April.

That committee had considered a bill that would have authorized the Legislature to be in charge of the wolf delisting decision. At that time, environmentalists testified they believed the Legislature did not have the expertise to make a delisting decision and that the Fish and Wildlife Commission was the only body capable of making such a determination:

"Managing our state's wildlife is the role and responsibility of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and decisions regarding listing or delisting species are entrusted to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and decisions regarding listing or delisting species are entrusted to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. These entities have the necessary

scientific, policy and legal expertise to make these decisions, and the processes to ensure full compliance with the law and opportunities for public participation."



Sen. Doug Whitsett

Now that the commission has made its decision, we believe it is important for them to hear and understand that quote. It would be much more difficult for environmentalists to successfully overturn a delisting made by the Legislative Assembly than a delisting made by the commission.

We understand that environmental organizations are unhappy with the commission's decision and believe they are likely to sue the commission, even though they nuanced their delisting decision by suggesting that the Legislature should limit the delisting to Eastern Oregon and significantly enhance the penalty for killing a wolf. Under current Oregon law, that penalty is a \$6,250 fine and up to one year in jail.

Much of the testimony provided by environmentalists at the hearing appeared to be based on emotion rather than reality. A frequent argument was that the delisting would open the door for the wholesale slaughter of wolves. This is simply not true.

Although a giant step forward for protection of some livestock, the state delisting does not allow the killing of any wolf in the area designated as Western Oregon, lethal action may only be taken against wolves in the area designated as Eastern Oregon, and then only when they are literally "caught in the act" of killing or maiming livestock.

The commission action will provide little help to reduce wolf depredation in Klamath County because, absurdly, Western Oregon is now defined to include most of Central and Southwestern Oregon. Therefore, only non-lethal means are being deployed to discourage the lone wolf that killed and maimed the Klamath County calves.

The Oregon Endangered Species Act requires conservation that brings a species to the point where measures are no longer necessary. It requires the commission to base the delisting on scientific criteria related to the species' biological status in Oregon and mandates the use of documented and verifiable scientific information.

Oregon's current wolf plan was developed in 2009, and was a collaborative effort directly involving all of the stakeholders, including environmental groups. It was approved unanimously in the Senate and had broad bipartisan support in the House.

Under the plan, it was agreed that the delisting could be considered once the wolf population reached a specific threshold. That threshold was reached nearly a year ago.

Ranchers and other people in Eastern Oregon upheld their part of the bargain. They endured the last several years abiding by the terms of the wolf plan, with the understanding that delisting would occur once the wolf population reached the milestone established under the agreement.

Last April, ODFW issued a draft evaluation recommending delisting of the wolf. ODFW staff made the recommendation to delist the wolf last month based on their best science and reiterated the recommendation during the hearing.

They based their recommendation on the fact that Oregon wolves are not in danger of extinction, and that existing programs and regulations are adequate to protect the species and its habitat. In short, the plan was created, agreed upon, and the criteria for delisting has now been exceeded.

The Oregon wolf plan does not allow for hunting or other unauthorized killing of wolves. It only allows for taking of wolves as a management tool, in response to depredation. Nonetheless, environmentalist organizations attempted to use their typical tactics to pursue their agenda. Their rhetoric is reminiscent of the disastrous 1994 Northwest Forest Management Plan, when stakeholders came to an extensive agreement that was almost immediately derailed by environmental groups failing to act in good faith. The lengthy trail of lawsuits and devastated rural communities is now the true legacy of those efforts.

For wolf advocates, the delisting represents a major setback in their concerted, coordinated and continued efforts to eliminate the grazing of cattle and sheep on public lands. The most significant change resulting from the delisting is that environmentalists would no longer be able to use the Oregon ESA to file frivolous lawsuits under the guise of protecting the wolves.

Within hours of the commission's decision, the Center for Biological Diversity was already using the delisting for fundraising purposes. They are promising to take the ODFW to court within days to overturn the delisting. Apparently, they now believe the ODFW expert scientists are incapable making a decision based on sound science.

Last week's delisting decision ultimately represents a hard-fought victory for rural Oregonians who have lived under the constant threat posed by these dangerous and destructive predators. Hopefully, common sense will continue to prevail, and the organized wolf advocates will no longer be able to use the wolves to advance their agenda to deliberately destroy the livelihoods of people outside the Willamette Valley.

Please remember — if we do not stand up for rural Oregon, no one will.

Sen. Doug Whitsett represents District 28 in the Oregon Legislature.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks for the veterans ceremony

To the Editor:

On Monday, Nov. 9, Grant Union students and faculty honored county veterans. The sincere ceremony, from the Pledge of Allegiance, students singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America" to the background of a beautiful large American flag that unrolled from the ceiling of the gym, was impressive and appreciated.

The event was completed with the students and teachers passing in line to shake our hands and present each vet with hand-written notes of appreciation for our military service.

From an old WWII and Korean

War veteran, I want to say "Thanks" to those who made the event possible, and realize freedom isn't free.

Joseph E. Schmitz
John Day

Commissioners need a spokesperson

To the Editor:

The three county commissioners each speak their own opinion. That's friction. With that attitude, the county is always a loser.

They need a secretary or spokesperson who makes a statement to the press, the three of them represented as a whole, undivided public elected unity.

W. Toop
Canyon City

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