

WOLF

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The groups also believe ODFW should continue collaring wolves, and should set a population cap for wolves in Oregon. Without a benchmark, “we will not be able to tell when wolves have reached their natural carrying capacity” in the state, the Farm Bureau said in a statement.

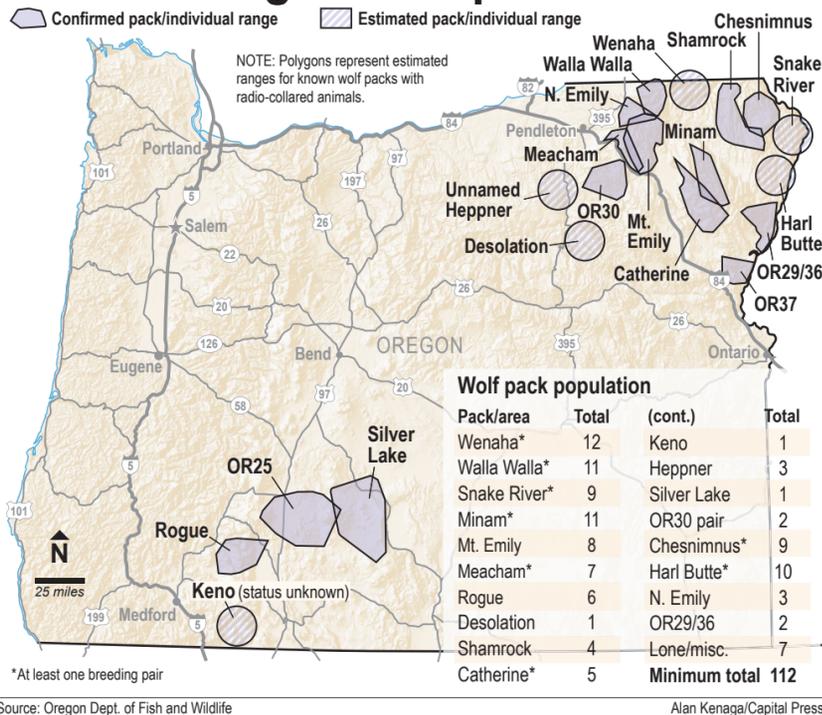
Cattlemen also want local biologists to make the call on lethal control of wolves, not department administrators in Salem. Todd Nash, the association’s wolf policy chair, said ranchers’ views aren’t reflected in the draft plan.

“It doesn’t look like we were even in the room, and that’s really disappointing,” he said.

Some activists, however, believe ODFW is moving too quickly to relax conservation safeguards, including the decision in 2015 to take wolves off the state endangered species list. Among other things, they point to the annual wolf count figures released this past week as proof the population is fragile. The minimum count of 112 wolves at the end of 2016 was only two more than in 2015, after years of sharp growth. Even ODFW described the population gain as “weak.”

The department said a combination of factors probably contributed to the modest increase. At least seven wolves were killed in 2016, including

Known Oregon wolf packs (As of Dec. 31, 2016)



four members of the Imnaha Pack shot by ODFW for repeated livestock attacks. Blood samples taken from captured wolves indicated many animals were exposed to recent or severe parvovirus infections, which can take a toll on pups. Finally, bad winter weather hampered efforts to count wolves. Wildlife officials stress the annual population figure is a minimum number, and believe

the state has considerably more wolves.

Nonetheless, Nick Cady, legal director for the Eugene-based group Cascadia Wildlands, said wolves aren’t the “exponentially growing and undefeatable species” that opponents sometimes describe.

“One hard winter and there’s no growth,” he said.

Cady said wolf recovery faces numerous hurdles. An-

ti-predator bills pop up in the Legislature on a regular basis and ODFW is deferential to hunting interests that provide budget money through license sales, he said. The state appears headed to a wolf management approach that allows hunting while doing “basic level monitoring so they don’t go extinct, which I think wolves are not ready for.”

Cascadia Wildlands oppos-

es killing wolves if deer and elk populations drop. Cady said proper habitat is a greater factor in ungulate populations than wolves. The group also opposes draft plan provisions that allow USDA Wildlife Services to conduct livestock depredation investigations. Cady said the agency is too quick to blame wolves for every attack.

Wildlife Services came under intense criticism this spring when it killed an Oregon wolf with an M-44 cyanide poison trap set to kill coyotes. Soon after, a dog in Idaho died and a teenage boy was injured when they encountered an M-44. Wildlife Service subsequently announced it would not use the devices in six Eastern Oregon counties where the majority of the state’s wolves live.

“Given their track record, they shouldn’t be involved in predator management in Oregon in any capacity,” Cady said.

Past wolf hearings have become displays of the state’s urban-rural divide. Wildlife activists from Portland and Eugene, and from out of state, tend to celebrate the presence of wolves restored to the landscape. Cattle ranchers and other rural residents tend to testify about the expense of defensive measures and the grisly results of livestock attacks.

As the draft wolf plan authors put it, “people with the

most positive attitudes about wolves have been those with the least experience with them. People who live in areas with wolves have more negative attitudes toward wolves than the general public, and negative attitudes are further amplified by wolf predation of livestock.

“In Oregon, it is expected that an increasing and expanding population of wolves will result in more, not less, conflict in the future,” the plan concludes.

The plan says the impact of wolves on deer and elk is mixed, and is complicated by the presence and feeding habits of cougars, bears, coyotes and bobcats.

When hunting elk, “wolves continually test prey to identify weak individuals” they can single out for attack. Such “near constant hunting pressure” could change the habitat use, vigilance, movement rates and migration patterns of elk, according to the report.

The fitness and reproductive potential of elk could be expected to decline in such cases.

Wolves don’t eat mule deer that often, but their presence could force cougars into steeper terrain where they’d be more likely to encounter mule deer, according to the report.

The second public meeting is Friday, May 19, at the Embassy Suites hotel near the Portland Airport.

WYDEN

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John Day resident Ashley Stevick asked what he was doing to protect access to health care and women’s reproductive rights.

“I’ve always felt that health care is the most important issue,” Wyden said, adding he would continue to protect the Affordable Care Act and the protections it offers.

“On my watch, as long as I’m chairman and a ranking member on the finance

committee, we are not going to deny women the opportunity to go to the doctor they trust,” Wyden said.

Grant County resident Pat Holliday urged Wyden work with Republicans to solve problems and to fight for the re-authorization of Secure Rural Schools funds, which have helped fund schools, roads and restoration projects.

Wyden, who co-authored the SRS legislation, said he would “pull out all the stops” and work with Republicans to get the funds back. He said he had support in the House for the issue and that a key fac-

tor would be to get the timber harvest back up. Wyden said he wanted to break the party gridlock and party polarization by working together on issues both parties could agree on, such as tax reform and fighting against special interest lobbies.

A Grant Union student asked Wyden about the “blockade” of claims the Department of Veterans Affairs was dealing with. Wyden responded that veteran care in Oregon is actually quality care, if vets are able to access it. He proposed hiring more employees at the VA and

making more care providers available to veterans.

Former Grant County commissioner Chris Labhart expressed disappointment at recent divisive rhetoric in the country and asked Wyden to clarify proposed cuts to the Meals On Wheels program.

Wyden said the Department of Health and Human Services could receive a 16.7 percent cut, which would affect Meals on Wheels. He commended Labhart for his work delivering meals to senior citizens in Grant County and said preventative care, such as ensuring seniors’ basic needs are met, keeps them out of the emergency room and cuts down on Medicaid costs.

In response to a question about increased national security, Wyden urged people not to give up liberty for security. He said he was working against efforts to weaken encryptions protecting information against hackers, terrorists and pedophiles.

Local attorney Jonathan Bartov asked Wyden about



The Eagle/Rylan Boggs  
John Day resident Ashley Stevick asks U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden a question about healthcare during a town hall meeting at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School.

protections recently repealed by the Federal Communications Commission that prohibited communication providers from selling personal information such as browsing history without explicit consent. Bartov asked if any efforts were being made to reinstate those protections.

Wyden called the repeal “one of the most horrible decisions I can remember” and

an example of “outrageous special interest power.” He said browsing information is incredibly personal and shouldn’t be sold without consent and said he would work to try to overturn it.

Wyden closed the meeting by saying political change starts at the ground level in places like town hall meetings and works from the bottom up.

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