

WOLVES

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Compensation committee

When wolves do prey on livestock, the state has a mechanism to compensate ranchers for their losses.

The Oregon Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance Grant Program is administered by the state Department of Agriculture with funds allocated by the Legislature, distributed to counties and awarded to producers.

Jerry Baker, a part-time wildlife biologist who lives in Athena, serves as chairman of the Umatilla County Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee. He said the group meets two or three times a year to apply for funding and consider requests for compensation.

"We know (wolves) are here," Baker said. "We're trying to deal with them."

In February, the committee awarded nearly \$50,000 in state money to ranchers for livestock compensation, including nonlethal deterrents for hazing wolves away from their property. Baker said the



Contributed photo/ODFW

A remote camera catches a wolf from the North Emily group in northeast Oregon.

committee will meet again sometime in November or December, and has received about a half-dozen requests so far this summer.

In the case of Cunningham Sheep, the company satisfied its requirements for non-lethal deterrence prior to asking for lethal control, according to ODFW. That includes removing dead or weakened animals from their herd that may attract wolves, and hiring a range rider five days a week to monitor the pasture.

"We've had depredations before," Rimbach said. "For

whatever reason, it really ramped up this year."

Cunningham Sheep would normally graze cattle on the pasture until October. Instead, the company is rounding up the animals to move to another location. It also gave up using its adjacent sheep allotment two years ago to avoid wolf conflicts.

Larry Givens, Umatilla County commissioner and liaison to the wolf compensation committee, said he sympathizes with ranchers, and will continue to lobby Salem for greater support.



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The Mt. Emily Summit Road runs through the territory of three known wolf packs in the Umatilla National Forest near Meacham.

"That's a tremendous financial loss to these folks," Givens said. "We know we can't just go out and get rid of the wolves. So we have to have a way to mitigate those losses."

Continued growth

Driving along Summit Road near Fox Prairie, Rimbach can point in the direction of multiple areas of wolf activity within just a few miles.

The Meacham pack can be found four or five miles to the west. OR-11 — the Walla Walla pack disperser — is

now about four miles to the north with a new mate. To the south is OR-52, recently paired up with a mate outside the Union County town of Perry.

The Blue Mountains is a popular spot for outdoor recreation, and Rimbach insists wolves do not change that dynamic. Wolves tend to avoid humans, he said, and locals should not have any concerns for safety.

"The chance of people having any adverse effect with wolves is almost zero," he said. "They might sit on

their haunches and watch as you walk by, but that's about it."

Rimbach did caution against letting dogs run off leash in wolf territory, as the predators do become territorial with other canines. As for folks who live in the area, the presence of wolves is nothing new.

"I don't think it's a big surprise to the few people who live there year-round," he said. "They'll see wolf tracks there. They've been seeing those for five years."

If the latest documented wolf pairings become full-fledged packs, Rimbach said he could see where wolves in the district start running out of room to function, and the population naturally begin to level off.

Baker said he believes wolves have fared better in the area than anybody expected, and he is interested in seeing how they affect the local ecosystem in the coming years.

"We're going to have to work together on this, all of us, to try and make the best situation we can," Baker said. "Because (wolves) are here to stay. No doubt about it."

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