

Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management 2014 Annual Report



This report to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission presents information on the status, distribution, and management of wolves in the State of Oregon from January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) in Oregon are listed statewide as endangered under the Oregon Endangered Species Act (ESA). Wolves occurring west of Oregon Highways 395/78/95 continued to be federally protected as endangered under the federal ESA.

The 2014 Oregon minimum wolf population is 77 wolves. Nine packs were documented and eight of those packs met the criteria as breeding pairs. Known wolf packs occurred in parts of Baker, Jackson, Klamath, Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa Counties. In addition six new pairs of wolves were also confirmed in Oregon; five within the Eastern Wolf Management Zone and one within the Western Wolf Management Zone. 2014 marks the third year that the conservation population objective (four breeding pairs in eastern Oregon), as defined in the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan), was achieved.

Six wolves were captured and radio-collared in 2014 and throughout the year as many as 18 GPS radio-collared wolves were monitored. At year-end 13 wolves (17% of the population) were radio-collared in Oregon. Three radio-collared wolves dispersed out of state. No adult mortality or incidental take was documented in Oregon during 2014.

Confirmed depredation of livestock decreased; 11 incidents of wolf depredation were confirmed in five areas of Oregon in 2014. Per the Wolf Plan the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) and area producers implemented non-lethal measures to minimize depredation.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture's compensation program awarded \$150,830 in 8 counties in 2014. Most funds were used for preventative measures and secondarily for direct payment of confirmed depredations.

Public interest in Oregon wolf management remained high in 2014. Members of the public can sign up to be automatically notified of new wolf information and in 2014 the number of subscribers increased by 31%. Currently, 4,496 people subscribe to the department's wolf update web page.

The Oregon State University/ODFW wolf-cougar research project in northeastern Oregon continued in 2014. This project is primarily focused on understanding competitive interactions and prey selection between wolves and cougars in the Mt Emily Wildlife Management Unit (WMU). Researchers collected information by monitoring radio-collared cougars (5) and wolves (2 packs) within the Mt Emily WMU.

2014 OREGON WOLF PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Regulatory Status

Federal Listing Status: In June, 2013 The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) completed its status review for gray wolves in the Pacific Northwest and proposed to remove gray wolves from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife, while maintaining endangered status for

the Mexican wolf as a subspecies. Pending outcome of the proposed action, wolves occurring west of Oregon Highways 395/78/95 continued to be federally protected as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. In the federally listed portion of Oregon, the department implements the Wolf Plan under the guidance of the Federal/State Coordination Strategy (March 2011).

State Listing Status: Wolves in Oregon remain listed statewide as endangered under the Oregon Endangered Species Act. The Wolf Plan sets a conservation population objective of four breeding pairs for three consecutive years in eastern Oregon and 2014 is the first year this objective has been achieved. This also prompts entry into Phase 2 of the Wolf Plan.

Population, Distribution, and Reproduction

Minimum Population and Distribution: Nine wolf packs were documented (eight in northeastern Oregon and one in southwestern Oregon) and this includes two recently formed (Meacham and Rogue) packs. In addition, six new pairs of wolves were also documented during the year (Figure 1). For monitoring purposes, a pack is defined as four or more wolves traveling together in winter. The 2014 minimum Oregon wolf population is 77 wolves (Table 1), a 20% increase from the previous year (Figure 2).

Table 1. Minimum wolf population (Total = 77) in Oregon on Dec. 31, 2014. Underlined packs are counted as breeding pairs.

Pack/Area	Total
Catherine Pair	2
Chesnimnus Pair	2
Desolation Pair	2
Imnaha Pack	5
Keno Pair	2
<u>Meacham Pack</u>	5
<u>Minam Pack</u>	9
<u>Mt. Emily Pack</u>	7
<u>Rogue Pack</u>	5
Sled Springs Pair	2
<u>Snake River Pack</u>	6
South Snake Wolves	2
<u>Umatilla River Pack</u>	8
<u>Walla Walla Pack</u>	9
<u>Wenaha Pack</u>	11

Reproduction: Eight breeding pairs were documented in 2014 (Figure 3) which produced 26 known pups surviving through December 31. A breeding pair is defined as an adult male and adult female with at least two pups at the end of the year.

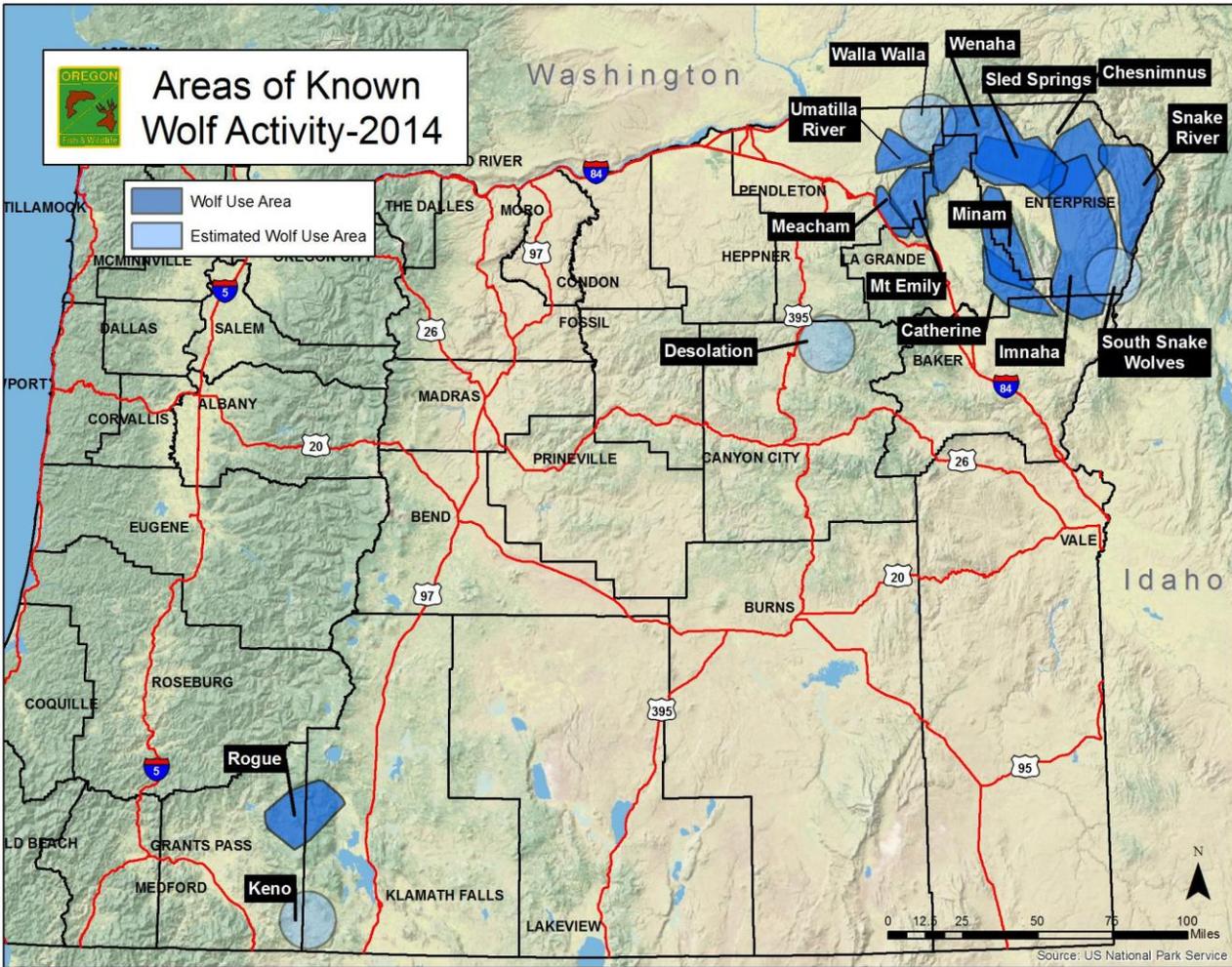


Figure 1. Distribution of Oregon wolves in 2014.

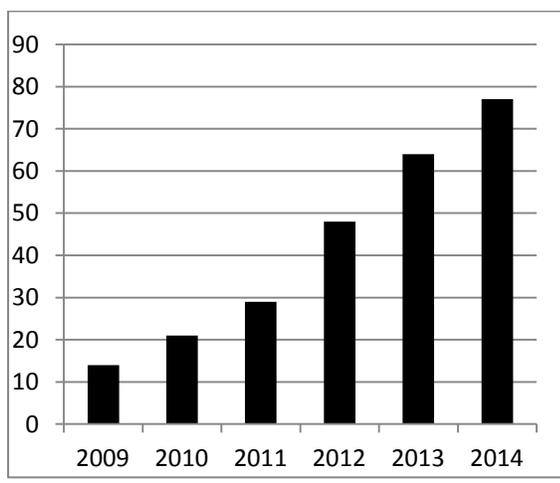


Figure 2. Estimated minimum wolf population in Oregon (2009-2014).

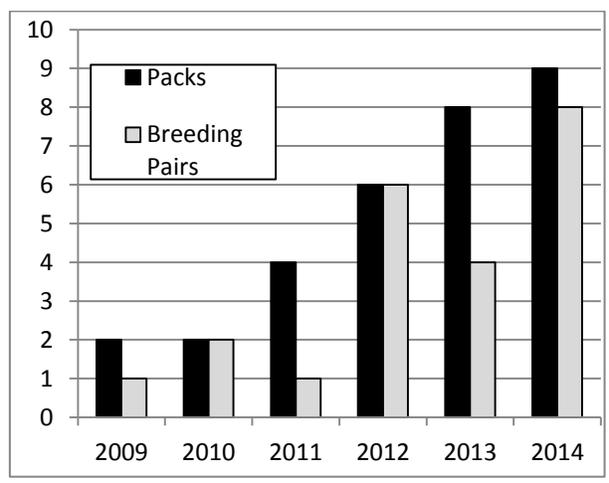


Figure 3. Number of packs and breeding pairs in Oregon (2009-2014).

Pack Summaries

Imnaha Pack: The Imnaha Pack was first documented in 2009. The packs' long-time breeding female (OR2) was not with the pack in 2014. In her place a new breeding female produced only one known pup and by year's end no surviving pups were observed despite multiple observations of the pack. Therefore the pack was not counted as a breeding pair. Two radio-collars (1 GPS, 1 VHF) remained in the pack – OR4 (breeding male) and OR25 (other male). The pack showed a use area of 958 mi² in 2014 and 26% of the pack's location data points occurred on private land, a decrease from 32% in 2013. Two depredation incidents were attributed to this pack in 2014.

Minam Pack: The Minam Pack was discovered within the Eagle Cap Wilderness in the Minam Unit in June 2012. The pack produced at least three pups that survived to the end of the year and was counted as a breeding pair in 2014. The breeding female (OR20) was GPS-collared in May of 2013 and her data shows the pack using a 352 mi² area, primarily public lands (89%).

Mt Emily Pack: This pack was first identified in 2013 in the central portion of the Mt Emily Unit. The breeding male is a radio-collared disperser from the Walla Walla Pack. A subadult female was collared (OR28) in 2014 and her data shows the pack using a 257mi² area comprising 96% public lands. The pair produced at least four pups that survived to the end of the year and was counted as a breeding pair. Two depredation incidents were attributed to this pack in 2014.

Snake River Pack: The Snake River Pack was first discovered in the fall of 2011. The pack was counted as a breeding pair in 2014 with four pups surviving to the end of the year. Two radio-collared subadult wolves were monitored during the year, both dispersing from the pack by spring. The location data showed a pack area of 397 mi² and 96% use of public lands within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

Umatilla River Pack: First discovered in 2011 in the northern part of the Mt Emily Unit. The pair was counted as a breeding pair for the third year with at least two pups. This pack was responsible for three depredation incidents in 2014. The breeding male and another male are GPS radio-collared and collar data shows the pack using a 153 mi² area with 87% of locations on private lands, 3% public land and 10% tribal land.

Wenaha Pack: This pack was first discovered in 2008. The pack produced four pups surviving to the end of the year in 2014, thus qualifying as a breeding pair. One female is GPS collared within this pack. In addition to the pack's traditional area (Wenaha unit), 12% of its locations occurred within the Sled Springs Unit in 2014. The collar data shows the pack using an 870 mi² area with 85% of location data on public land. Though monitoring data showed a small amount of time (9%) spent in Washington, most of the packs locations, and the den, were in Oregon therefore this pack is counted in Oregon's wolf population.

Walla Walla Pack: This pack was first discovered in 2011. The pack produced at least four pups that survived to the end of the year and was counted as a breeding pair. Three collared wolves dispersed during the 2012/2013 winter, leaving no radio-collared wolves in the pack during 2014.

Meacham Pack: This newly formed pack was identified in 2014 in the southern portion of the Mt Emily Unit. One incident of depredation was attributed to the Meacham Pack in 2014. The pack produced two pups that survived to the end of the year and is counted as a breeding pair. The packs breeding male (OR26) was GPS-collared in May and his data shows the pack using a 95mi² area which consists of 82% private land.

Rogue Pack: This new pack was first recognized in 2014 in the southern Cascade Mountains. The packs breeding male (OR7) is collared with a GPS-radio collar, and in 2014 he paired with a female, establishing a territory in the eastern Rogue and western Keno Units. The pair produced three pups that survived to the end of the year and was counted as a breeding pair in 2014. OR7's location data in 2014 shows the pack area of use at 355mi², with 82% on public lands.

Other wolves

Catherine Pair: Both wolves, OR24 and OR27, are two year-old GPS-collared wolves from the Snake River (OR24) and Minam (OR27) packs. These wolves dispersed from their natal packs and paired in July of this year. Since that time the pair has been located in the upper elevation forested portions of the Keating and Catherine Creek Units, with most locations occurring within the Eagle Cap Wilderness. The area of use for both wolves is 232mi² comprising 97% public lands.

Desolation Wolves: In December of 2014 tracks of two wolves were documented in the Desolation Unit (Grant County) by department biologists. Irregular reports of wolf activity have been received over the past year in this general area of National Forest, and department biologists documented two instances of a single wolf in this same area earlier in the year.

Chesnimnus Pair: In November of 2014, OR23 (a female from the Umatilla River Pack) dispersed to the northern portion of the Chesnimnus Unit and later paired with a male wolf. Prior to OR23's arrival in this area, at least four wolves had been documented in the same area during the summer, and three incidents of depredation were attributed to these wolves. All depredation incidents were prior to OR23 arriving. Collar data shows the new pair using a 380mi² comprising 75% public lands.

Sled Springs Pair: In October of 2014, OR21 (a radio-collared female from the Wenaha Pack) dispersed to the central portion of the Sled Springs Unit and paired with a male wolf. Location data shows the pair use area at 287mi², primarily on private lands (92%).

Keno Pair: In December 2014 and January 2015, evidence of a pair of wolves was documented in the western portion of the Keno Unit. It is an area where irregular reports of wolf activity were received over the past year.

South Snake Wolves: Evidence of wolf activity in the south Snake River Unit began as early as August 2014 and information of repeated use of this area (by wolves other than the Snake River Pack or the Innaha Pack) was later documented in January 2015. Although evidence of at least two wolves was confirmed, little is known of these new wolves at the time of this report.

Capture and Monitoring

Capture: In 2014, six wolves were captured and radio-collared, including one recapture (OR4). All wolves captured were fitted with Global Positioning System (GPS) collars. (Table 2).

Table 2. Wolves captured in Oregon in 2014

Date	Wolf ID#	Age/Color/Sex	Pack	Collar Type	Method
2/26/2014	OR4	Adult, black male	Imnaha	GPS collar	Helicopter
3/24/2014	OR24	Subadult, black, male	Snake River	GPS collar	Helicopter
5/20/2014	OR25	Yearling, black, male	Imnaha	GPS collar	Trap
5/25/2014	OR26	Adult, black, male	Meacham	GPS collar	Trap
6/03/2014	OR27	Subadult, gray, female	Minam	GPS collar	Trap
6/07/2014	OR28	Subadult, black, female	Mt. Emily	GPS collar	Trap

Monitoring: Eighteen radio-collared wolves were monitored in Oregon in 2014. At year-end approximately 17% (n= 13) of the population was radio-collared in seven (78%) of the known packs. During the year the department collected a total of 17,087 wolf location data points in Oregon; most using GPS collars.

Wolf reports from the public continued to play an important role in 2014 and 237 wolf reports were received by the department's online wolf reporting system during the year. Subsequent follow-up of many of these reports by department personnel yielded valuable information, and in several cases resulted in the documentation of new wolf activity.

Dispersers, Mortalities, and Incidental Take: Seven radio-collared dispersing wolves were monitored in 2014; four dispersed within Oregon, and three left the state. No mortalities or incidental takes were documented in Oregon in 2014.

LIVESTOCK DEPREDACTION

Wolf Depredation Summary

Four of Oregon's wolf packs (Imnaha, Mt. Emily, Umatilla River, Meacham), and one unknown group of wolves in the Chesnimnus Unit depredated livestock in 2014. Overall, confirmed incidents of depredation decreased in 2014 from the previous year (11 vs. 13), however the number of losses increased (Figure 4) – a result of several resulting in multiple sheep lost. The department conducted 34 wolf depredation investigations in five Oregon counties which resulted in 11 (32%) *confirmed* incidents, two (6%) *probable* incidents, nine (27%) *possible/unknown* incidents, and 12 (35%) *other* incidents. Confirmed losses in 2014 were two cattle, and 30 sheep (Table 3). Data of cow and sheep depredation across all years (n=56) shows that most depredation incidents occur during spring and fall (Figure 5).

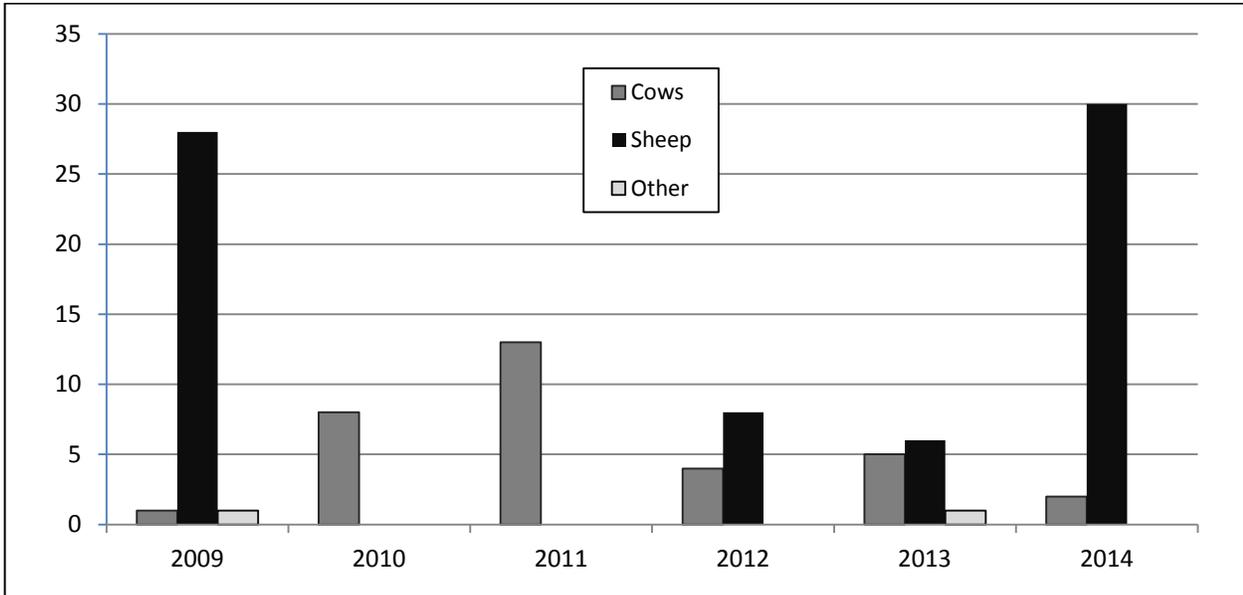


Figure 4. Number of confirmed livestock losses by year (2009-2014).

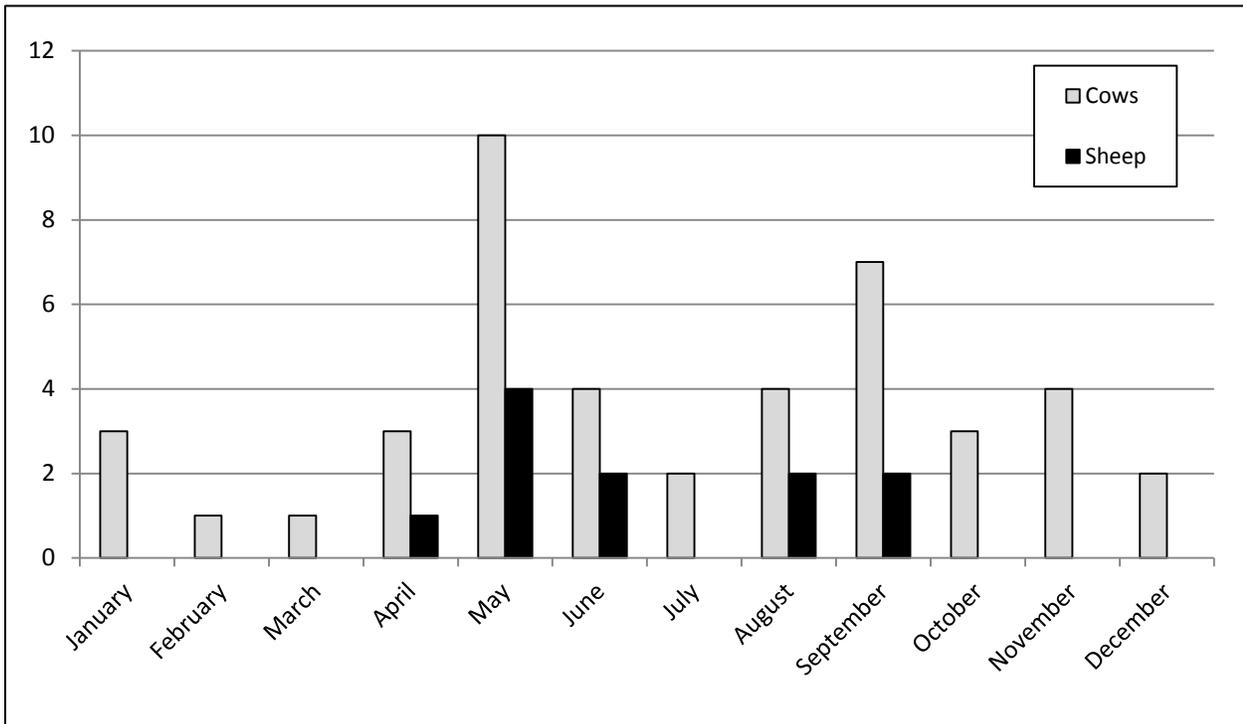


Figure 5. Number of cow and sheep depredation events by month (2009-2014).

Table 3. Summary of 2014 confirmed wolf depredation incidents in Oregon.

Date	Animals Affected	County	Pack Area
1/30/14	Sheep (Dead: 1 ewe)	Wallowa	Imnaha
5/30/14	Sheep (Dead: 2 ewes, 10 lambs. Injured: 6 lambs)	Wallowa	Chesnimmus
6/13/14	Sheep (Dead: 4 ewes, 4 lambs. Injured: 4 ewes, 1 lamb)	Umatilla	Umatilla River
6/14/14	Cow (Injured: 1 cow)	Umatilla	Umatilla River
7/16/14	Cow (Dead: 1 calf)	Wallowa	Chesnimmus
8/14/14	Cow (Injured: 1 calf)	Wallowa	Chesnimmus
8/20/14	Sheep (Dead: 1 ewe)	Umatilla	Umatilla River
9/15/14	Sheep (Dead: 3 ewes). Dogs (Injured: 2)	Umatilla	Mt. Emily
9/16/14	Sheep (Dead: 2 ewes, 2 rams, 1 lamb)	Umatilla	Mt. Emily
9/18/14	Cow (Dead: 1 calf)	Wallowa	Imnaha
9/24/14	Cow (Injured: 1 calf)	Umatilla	Meacham

Compensation for Wolf-Caused Losses

The Oregon Department of Agriculture’s Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance County Block Grant Program was again implemented in 2014. The program provides four types of financial assistance options; 1) direct depredation payment, and 2) missing livestock payment, and 3) preventative measures, and 4) program implementation costs. The department’s primary roles are determining if wolf depredation has occurred, and to delineate areas of known wolf activity. In 2014 the department was also asked by some counties to provide input on appropriate non-lethal and preventative measures.

Compensation committees have now been formed in twelve Oregon counties (Baker, Crook, Grant, Jefferson, Klamath, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco, and Wheeler). The total amount of requested grant funds for 2014 was \$174,655, and eight counties were awarded \$150,830 in 2014 (Table 4).

Table 4. Funds awarded through the County Block Grant Program in 2014 (source; Oregon Department of Agriculture)

County	Death/Injury	Missing	Prevention	Implement	Total
Wallowa	\$7,482	\$13,596	\$43,500	\$675	\$65,253
Union	0	0	\$5,000	0	\$5,000
Baker	\$0	\$17,282	\$14,000	\$495	\$31,777
Umatilla	\$1,000	\$3,000	\$35,000	\$675	\$39,675
Crook	0	0	\$3,000	0	\$3,000
Malheur	0	0	0	\$450	\$450
Morrow	0	0	\$3,000	\$675	\$3,675
Wheeler	0	0	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,000
Award Amount	\$8,482	\$33,878	\$105,500	\$2,970	\$150,830

Oregon Wolf Depredation Tax Credit

The State of Oregon's wolf depredation tax credit program was created in 2012 by the Oregon Legislature and allows qualified applicants to receive a state tax credit pursuant to Chapter 65, Oregon Laws 2012, for the market value of any livestock that belongs to a taxpayer and that is killed during the year by a wolf. To claim the credit a taxpayer must first receive a certification by the department.

Since the inception of this program in 2012, only two credit applications have been processed by the department, and this includes one application for 2014.

WOLF RESEARCH

The Oregon State University/ODFW wolf-cougar research project in northeastern Oregon continued in 2014. This project is primarily focused on understanding competitive interactions and prey selection between wolves and cougars in the Mt Emily Wildlife Management Unit (WMU).

In summer 2014, researchers started collecting information by monitoring radio-collared cougars (5) and wolves (2 packs) within the Mt Emily WMU. Researchers will be using cluster analysis methods to identify potential prey acquisition sites and document prey species selection and acquisition rates. Data collection for the wolf-cougar research project will continue through summer 2018.

Future steps for this project will be to; 1) collar additional wolves and cougars within the study area and investigate competitive interactions between the two species, and 2) conduct cluster analysis and investigate prey acquisition sites for wolves and cougar during both winter and summer seasons.

INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

The Department continued to rely on its internet-based wolf webpage as the primary information distribution tool in 2013. Its subscribers increased by 1,063 (31%) during 2014. Currently, 4,496 people subscribe to the department's Wolf Update page.

In 2013, the department also added a Wolf-Livestock update page that focuses on the needs of livestock producers and the requirements of the new Oregon Administrative Rules. Since this page was launched, 2,572 people have subscribed to updates on confirmed depredations, qualifying incidents, maps of Areas of Known Wolf Activity and Areas of Depredating Wolves, Conflict Deterrence Plans and other information.

Over the year, the online wolf pages received 193,020 views, about 21,000 more than last year. The wolf program home page alone received nearly 72,000 views.

In addition to web-based information, the department conducted numerous media interviews to print, radio and television reporters. Presentations were given to schools, universities, other agencies, agriculture meetings and organizations, sportsman organizations, and conservation groups.

WOLF PROGRAM FUNDING

Wolf program funding during the 2013-2015 biennium is from a variety of sources which includes federal funds from the State Wildlife Grant program, Pittman-Robertson funds and the US Fish and Wildlife Service grants. Some of these federal grants require state match which comes from a combination of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife license dollars and Lottery Funds. Two full time employees are associated with the program and the total budget allocation for the 2013-2015 biennium is \$641,004.