

Incorporation of Initial Topics - WPSR January 8, 2018

Radio Collars

The WPSR Working Group had a good discussion at the Aug 30 and Oct 9 meetings on the prioritization and values of continuing to maintain efforts for radio collaring wolves throughout geographic areas in Oregon. The language below is what was presented at the Oct 9 meeting and is now directly reflected in draft of the Monitoring Wolf Populations section for proposed Plan update. The text from the current 2010 Wolf Plan followed by the proposed plan update for 2019 is included below for review (some **key differences are highlighted**). As discussed before by staff, WPSR members are cautioned to not over-rely on collars to address ongoing livestock management, or to evaluate/target best management practices for non-lethal tools or as a critical tool for investigating wolf livestock conflict.

Proposed Resolution to be reflected in the Plan update:

- As part of the Monitoring Wolves section of the Plan, radio-collaring will be identified as a priority action; collaring activities are recognized to have reasonable and practical limits with respect to budgetary, human health, and animal considerations.
- During Phase I and Phase II, continued efforts will be made to collar at least one member of known packs with emphasis on at least one breeding adult. Other pack members may be collared to the extent feasible and depending on circumstances or pack-specific monitoring needs.
- During Phase III, collaring is still important to generally monitor the wolf population (e.g., assists in counts of wolf packs as an indirect estimator of breeding pairs) and address situations of livestock depredation or other wolf-human conflict. While not all packs in Phase III areas will be expected to have collared wolves, managers will consider the proximity to livestock and history of wolf-livestock conflict when prioritizing collaring efforts.
- Dispersing wolves that appear to establish residency in new locations are also a priority consideration.
- GPS collars will continue to be used in select collaring situations where additional or more precise data is required. However, in some cases VHF radio-telemetry collars will be used to monitor wolves.

C. Monitoring Wolf Populations <pages 31-33 from [Current 2010 Wolf Plan](#)>

Objective

- Determine the status of the wolf population in Oregon through a comprehensive monitoring program.

Strategies

- Radio-telemetry will be the standard monitoring technique used to assess the number of wolf breeding pairs during Phases I and II. ODFW is authorized to capture, immobilize with drugs or other devices, and attach radio-collars to wolves.
- Once Phase III is reached, annual counts of wolf packs will be the method by which the population is assessed annually.
- Oregon will rely on cooperative relationships with adjacent states, other state and federal agencies, tribes, landowners, local governments, and non-governmental entities to effectively monitor breeding pairs or packs.
- In addition to radio-telemetry and field observations, reported sightings by the public and cooperators that

are verified will be used to determine the distribution of wolves in Oregon, size and location of wolf pack home ranges, and the extent of wolf range expansion.

- Monitoring methods for wolf packs developed and tested in other states will be evaluated for use in Oregon.
- Field observations using methods such as howling surveys and tracking will be used to assess wolf presence, location and pack activity.
- ODFW will maintain a database on wolf depredation of livestock.
- ODFW will maintain a database on wolf population parameters.

Radio-telemetry will be the main technique used to monitor wolf breeding pairs during Phase I and Phase II. During Phase III, wolf packs will be monitored to determine whether population objectives are being met. Biologists will begin the transition from breeding pairs to packs by concurrently surveying packs during winter and determining the number of breeding pairs as defined during Phase II. A wolf pack will be defined as “four or more wolves traveling together in winter.” This methodology is being tested in the Rocky Mountain Recovery Area.²⁵ Refinements in survey methodology developed in other states will be applied in Oregon when and where appropriate.

Regular radio-telemetry monitoring will provide information regarding other important population parameters such as pack distribution, mortality, dispersal, population trends, wolf den locations, rendezvous sites, winter use areas, and wolf territory boundaries. This information also will provide biologists an increased understanding of suitable habitat for wolves in Oregon.

ODFW will have primary responsibility to monitor the wolf population under this conservation and management Plan. Collaboration with tribes, other state and federal agencies, jurisdictions, universities, landowners, local government, and the public is essential to the success of the monitoring program. This coordination will be especially important when monitoring packs near state borders or when packs are located on or near tribal lands.

Phase I – During Phase I, an effort will be made to collar wolves within reasonable and practical limits with respect to financial, human health, and animal impacts. For known packs, every effort will be made to collar the alpha male and female, and then collar the remaining pack members to the extent feasible. To further improve information gathering and understanding of wolf behavior, each pack will have at least one member collared with a global positioning system (GPS) collar which records geographical movements. At the time collars are attached, blood samples will be taken for health and genetic analysis.

Phase II – Monitoring during this phase will be similar to Phase I. ODFW will continue active collaring on any new packs (once pack activity is identified), with a goal of collaring at least three members of a pack including at least one of the alphas. Ear tagging or tattooing pups would be employed to enable identification and tracking if wolves show up elsewhere. During this phase, data from collaring would be correlated with pack counts (howling surveys, winter track surveys) to enable an informed switch to pack counts in Phase III.

Phase III – The wolf population will be monitored through counts of wolf packs (i.e., a minimum of four wolves traveling together in winter) to assess wolf numbers and distribution. Collaring will be used in select situations, such as with dispersing wolves that appear in new locations. This will help understand how wolves’ behavior modifies according to habitat and situation. Appropriate marking of all wolves would continue to the extent possible. Trained volunteers may be used during this phase to aid in pack counts and other wolf surveys.

²⁵ Personal communication with Carolyn Sime, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

D. Monitoring Wolf Populations <pages 27-28 from [Working Copy of April 2017 Draft Wolf Plan Update \(11/17/2017\)](#)>

Objective

- Collect accurate information on the population status and distribution of wolves in Oregon through a comprehensive monitoring program.

Strategies

- Use radio-telemetry as the primary monitoring technique to assess the number of wolf breeding pairs during Phases I and II. Once Phase III is reached, use radio-telemetry in select situations and for annual counts of wolf packs.
- Use field observations and reported sightings by the public that are verified to assist managers in determining the distribution of wolves in Oregon, the location of wolf pack home ranges, and the extent of wolf range expansion.
- In addition to annual counts of wolves, use data derived from multiple sources to assess overall population health.
- Evaluate new methods for monitoring wolf populations, including the use of citizen-collected data, and methods developed and tested in other states.
- Continue to maintain the ODFW database on wolf population parameters.

Overall, data from multiple sources will be used to assess overall population health; including annual counts, telemetry data, survival rates, disease testing, and a variety of monitoring techniques. Radio-telemetry will continue to be an important technique used to monitor wolf breeding pairs during Phase I and Phase II and will provide information regarding other important population parameters such as pack distribution, mortality, dispersal, population trends, wolf den locations, rendezvous sites, winter use areas, and wolf territory boundaries. However, as the statewide wolf population increases, the use of monitoring methods which do not require capture of wolves will become increasingly important. Non-capture methods currently employed include howling, track, and scat surveys, camera surveillance, and aerial survey. New pack counts and survey techniques are being developed and tested in other states with wolves, and Oregon will continue to evaluate and use these methods as they become available. In addition, biologists will continue to collect genetic samples (in any phase) from captured wolves and other sources (e.g., scat) as available and within budgetary resources. These samples can be used to monitor abundance, genetic connectivity, and other population attributes.

Data collected by the public through broad-scale citizen science projects (i.e. data collected by a network of volunteers) may be useful in monitoring wolves in Oregon. Examples of large-scale citizen science projects include the long-standing Christmas Bird Count; the data-rich eBird (Sullivan et al. 2009); or the Wisconsin Volunteer Carnivore Tracking Program initiated in 1995 (Wisconsin DNR 2017). Biological data collected by volunteers generally requires training, specific proficiency standards, and in some cases a firm commitment by volunteers to complete surveys. In addition, rigorous filtering of volunteer-collected data is required to ensure its usefulness to managers. In Oregon, citizen-based surveys or monitoring may be helpful with assessing wolf presence, distribution, breeding status, and abundance. Potential types of volunteer monitoring include tracking surveys, scat detection/collection surveys, trail camera surveys, and even howl surveys. ODFW will continue to evaluate potential citizen science volunteer projects on a case-by-case basis and explore opportunities for volunteer projects to provide useful wolf monitoring information at an optimal cost-benefit basis.

ODFW will have primary responsibility to monitor the wolf population under this Plan. Collaboration with tribes, other state and federal agencies, jurisdictions, universities, landowners, local government, and the public is essential to the success of the monitoring program. This coordination will be especially important when monitoring packs near state borders or when packs are located on or near tribal lands.

During Phase I and Phase II, wolves will be collared within reasonable and practical limits with respect to budgetary, human health, and animal considerations. For known packs, effort will be made to collar at least one member of the pack with emphasis on at least one breeding adult. Other pack members may be collared to the extent feasible and depending on circumstances or pack-specific monitoring needs. GPS collars will continue to be used in select collaring situations where additional or more precise data is required. However, in some cases VHF radio-telemetry collars will be employed to monitor wolves.

During Phase III, the wolf population will generally be monitored through counts of wolf packs as an indirect estimator of breeding pairs. However, in years where initial survey data or other information indicate the possibility of dropping to Phase II or below Phase III population levels, breeding pairs will continue to be enumerated for that year. Biologists will begin the transition from breeding pairs to packs by concurrently surveying packs during winter and determining the number of breeding pairs during Phase II.. For the purpose of population monitoring, collaring will be used in select situations, such as with dispersing wolves that appear in new locations. However, radio-telemetry may also be employed in situations not specifically related to population monitoring such as situations of livestock depredation or other wolf-human conflict. While not all packs will be expected to have collared wolves, managers will consider the proximity to livestock and history of wolf-livestock conflict when prioritizing collaring levels.

Investigations

The proposed plan update for 2019 includes new strategies with additional section language to reflect the differences between federally listed and delisted areas on this issue. There will be an update to the USFWS/Wildlife Services/ODFW Coordination Strategy as an appendix to the proposed plan update for 2019. As noted at the Oct 9 meeting, the Department conducts depredation investigations for the purpose of implementing the administrative rule requirements and to implement the Plan's management tools related to wolf-livestock conflict. The demands for wolf-related management activities on Department field staff has increased significantly and become very large in several field offices , primarily a result of the increasing number of depredation investigations conducted. Consistent investigation protocols are especially important in situations of confirmed wolf depredation because of the potential management actions (e.g., lethal removal). Investigation results also link to compensation. Because of this, and regardless of who conducts the investigation in Phase 3, it is important to have a consistent protocol, training, and standards of confirmation. The text from the current 2010 Wolf Plan followed by the proposed plan update for 2019 is included below for review

A. Agency Response to Wolf Depredation <pages 51-52 from [Current 2010 Wolf Plan](#)>

Objective

- Develop and implement a proactive and effective wolf depredation response program that minimizes the risk of wolf-livestock conflict.

Strategies

- Respond to reports of wolf-livestock complaints in a timely manner (similar to response protocols for cougars and black bears) to prevent further losses.
- Negotiate an amendment to the Wildlife Services contract in Oregon that would include wolves in their area of responsibility.
- Coordinate with the ODA and Wildlife Services to assess the baseline of livestock losses due to depredation.
- Allow take by landowners under certain conditions authorized under the damage statutes (i.e., damage is presently occurring, permit is authorized to the landowner or to the landowner's designated agent, take must be on or near land where damage is occurring).

E. Agency Response to Wolf Depredation <pages 52-54 from [Working Copy of April 2017 Draft Wolf Plan Update \(11/17/2017\)](#)>

Objective

- Develop and implement an effective and transparent wolf depredation response program that responds to the needs of Oregon livestock producers and minimizes the risk of wolf-livestock conflict.

Strategies

- Respond to reports of wolf-livestock complaints in a timely manner (similar to response protocols for cougars and black bears) to investigate the situation, recommend actions to minimize depredation.
- Continue to include wolf responsibilities in the ODFW-Wildlife Services contract in Oregon.
- Ensure that investigations and determinations of wolf depredation are objectively conducted using a consistently applied standard of evidence—regardless of which agency performs the investigation.
- Coordinate with USFWS in federally listed areas to reduce wolf-livestock conflict while conserving wolves.

There is also a complete new list of strategies and discussion in the Livestock Producer Assistance section that highlights adaptive measures to streamline the process, address opportunities for local control and look for efficiencies where possible and appropriate.

F. Livestock Producer Assistance <pages 54-55 from [Working Copy of April 2017 Draft Wolf Plan Update \(11/17/2017\)](#)>

Objective

- Maintain and enhance a cooperative livestock producer assistance program that proactively minimizes wolf-livestock conflict and assists livestock producers experiencing wolf-related livestock losses.

Strategies

- Provide education, outreach and technical assistance to landowners and livestock producers to reduce wolf-livestock conflicts.
- Work with livestock producer organizations, county extension services, ODA, conservation organizations, and other appropriate groups and agencies to make outreach and educational materials available regarding depredation prevention (e.g., media materials, workshops, website resources, site reviews and evaluations).
- Provide resources necessary to implement non-lethal wolf control techniques as needed and available.
- Provide training to state and county personnel, volunteers and cooperators as needed. Training will focus on procedures for securing a depredation scene, preserving evidence, and identification of wolf depredation.
- Continue ODA's Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance County Block Grant Program.
- Provide landowners and local livestock producers the most current information on areas where wolves are known to be active.

ODFW has a long history of providing assistance to landowners and citizens affected by the actions of various wildlife species. The department has specific authority by the Oregon Legislature to manage wildlife populations in the state, guided by the agency's Wildlife Damage Policy. Field biologists respond to and provide assistance for a variety of wildlife damage complaints in both rural and urban settings. The type of assistance provided can take many forms including, but not limited to; technical advice, protective barriers, repellants, lethal or non-lethal removal, emergency hunts, hazing permits, kill permits, and forage enhancement programs.

Working proactively with livestock producers to minimize wolf-livestock conflicts will continue to be an important component of a livestock producer's assistance program. Sharing new information and techniques related to reducing potential wolf-livestock conflicts and making available the necessary tools and equipment will be essential for a successful program. ODFW will continue to work with other states, organizations, Tribes, and academic institutions to develop and refine preventive measures which reduce overall wolf-livestock conflicts.

In 2012, the ODA established and implemented a wolf depredation compensation and financial assistance grant program (ORS 610.150) to assist livestock producers with costs associated with wolf depredation and non-lethal control measures. Funds from this grant program are awarded to counties to help create and implement county wolf depredation compensation programs under which:

- Compensation is paid to persons who suffer loss or injury to livestock or working dogs due to wolf depredation.
- Financial assistance is provided to persons who implement livestock management techniques or non-lethal wolf deterrence techniques designed to discourage wolf depredation of livestock.
- Awards are only available to producers through counties with a wolf depredation compensation program to help with implementation and administrative costs.

The program is currently funded through a combination of federal grant funds, and funds in the Wolf Management Compensation and Proactive Trust Fund established by the Oregon Legislature in 2011 (ORS 610.155). Funds are made available to producers through Oregon counties participating in the program. In 2016, a total of 13 participating counties were awarded \$129,664 in grant funds. ODFW assists with the implementation of this program through two primary roles: determining when wolf depredation occurs and delineating areas of known wolf activity. In addition, ODFW will continue to provide input to counties on appropriate non-lethal and preventative measures. For additional information regarding the program, see <http://staging.apps.oregon.gov/oda/programs/ISCP/Pages/WolfDepredation.aspx>.

Attaching radio-collars to members of established wolf packs and regularly monitoring the collared wolves will provide important information regarding wolf movements in relation to areas used by livestock. Continued coordination between ODFW biologists, Wildlife Services and livestock producers regarding wolf movements will allow wildlife managers to anticipate potential conflict areas and respond appropriately. Livestock producers would have the option of making informed decisions regarding their animal husbandry practices in response to knowledge of wolf activity in livestock areas.

Other Sources of Mortality

As presented at the Oct 9 WPSR meeting, considerable information has been inserted into the Plan update on this issue. Specifically, the Potential Conservation Threats section on pages 18-27 and a new section for Strategies for Addressing Wolf Population Decline/Potential for Future State Relisting section on pages 17-18 in [Working Copy of April 2017 Draft Wolf Plan Update \(11/17/2017\)](#).

Compensation

All of the WPSR meetings have had conversations about continuing to have a Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance grant program as an important component in the balance of Wolf Conservation and Management on Oregon. The program is funded through a combination of federal grant funds, and funds in the Wolf Management Compensation and Proactive Trust Fund established by the Oregon Legislature. The Department assists ODA and the County Compensation Committees with the implementation of the program. The Department will maintain an integrated role on required aspects of the program including input on appropriate non-lethal and preventative measures.