

Definition of Chronic Depredation

Department staff sought out to redefine chronic depredation in Phase II and III to be consistent with past ODFW practice in conducting lethal control, and where data that indicates a higher probability that depredation will escalate. For the January 2017 Wolf Plan stakeholder meeting, a modest analysis of wolf depredations was conducted and presented to the group to aid in discussions on evaluating the definition of Chronic Depredation in Phase II and Phase III in the Plan. The concept of moving the Phase I standard (four depredations/six months) into Phase II and III was discounted because it does not adhere to the guiding principle of increasing management flexibility as the population increases. Based on the analysis, discussion with stakeholders, and an evaluation of previous agency decisions, the Draft Plan presented at the April 2017 Commission meeting proposed definitions to chronic depredation in those phases. For both Phase II and Phase III, chronic depredation would mean three confirmed livestock depredations within a twelve-month period or one confirmed and at least four “probable” determinations within a twelve-month period. This was presented with the clear understanding that this suggested number does not mandate lethal control, nor does it reduce the level of non-lethal effort.

The latter portion of the proposed chronic depredation definition (i.e. one confirmed and at least four “probable” determinations”) was removed from the Working Copy of the Draft Plan (December 2017 Commission meeting) based on little support from stakeholders and the Commission. Added to Phase III were situations where extreme circumstances would allow for lethal removal if certain criteria were met and two confirmed depredations had occurred.

At the December 2018 WPSR Work Group Meeting, members proposed varying definitions of chronic depredation, but finally consisted of two primary suggestions:

- Phases II and III: Define “chronic depredation” as three depredations in a grazing season (an approximately 6-to-9-month period)
- Phases II and III: Define “chronic depredation” as two depredations in a 12-month period; and, consideration of equating two probable depredations to one confirmed depredation.

Notable comments on the proposal included the livestock community stating they would most likely not support three depredations as the bar for chronic depredation. They argue the bar should not get higher as Oregon has more wolves. The livestock community would prefer to have a guarantee of lethal control after two depredations in a twelve-month period but are comfortable with ODFW using its discretion to consider lethal control after two depredations in twelve months in situations where it is clear that the producer has been trying to do non-lethal methods. However, they may be comfortable with a definition of two depredations in nine months, representing a single seasonal time period (e.g. one grazing season).

Members of the conservation community commented that two depredations seem insufficient as a threshold for “chronic.” They stated there should be time for the non-lethal methods to be in place to see if they can work to stop the depredations; two depredations does not allow sufficient time. Also, the twelve month period does not make sense because it could capture two depredation seasons, and that cannot be considered “chronic” so instead seasons should be looked at individually.

Agency Response

It was clear that most members were in support of a temporal component to the definition of chronic depredation and recognized potential issues with timeframes overlapping more than one depredation season or multiple timeframes within one season.

No agreement took place on two versus three confirmed depredations. ODFW prioritizes Oregon data for decision-making. Based on updated numbers to the January 2017 depredation analysis, wolves/packs that depredate twice have a third confirmed depredation 76% of the time.

The use of “probable” determinations in defining chronic depredation has received little support throughout this entire process and is partially due to the fact that probable determinations are highly infrequent.

Based on member discussion and comments, ODFW proposes to the WPSR group that chronic depredation in Phase II and III be defined as two confirmed depredations in a nine-month period. This suggested definition of chronic depredation would not mandate lethal control, nor would it reduce the expected level of non-lethal efforts. The agency would continue to exercise discretion in the appropriate response to situations of chronic depredation. Unlike ODFW's previous proposal, under this proposal there would be no exemptions for situations of extreme circumstances under the definition of chronic depredation (i.e. fewer depredations qualifying as chronic).