

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

Oregon wolves are listed as endangered on the list of endangered species under the Oregon Endangered Species Act (OESA). The Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan) contains a conservation population objective based in part on the requirements for delisting the species under OESA. The conservation population objective was achieved in January of this year and as called for in the Wolf Plan, staff initiated a biological status review process for wolves in Oregon.

As a first step in the Commission process to consider the state listing status of wolves, staff will present a draft report titled “Biological status review for the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Oregon and evaluation of criteria to remove the Gray Wolf from the List of Endangered Species under the Oregon Endangered Species Act”.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- Communication with livestock producer organizations, sportsman’s groups, conservation organizations and other interested parties.
- Communication with local residents in the areas affected by Oregon’s wolf population.
- Questions from interested persons, including the news media, were answered.

ISSUE 1

BIOLOGICAL STATUS REVIEW OF WOLVES IN OREGON IN CONSIDERATION OF POTENTIAL DELISTING FROM OREGON LIST OF ENDANGERED SPECIES

ANALYSIS

Oregon wolf population objectives were established using a three-phased approach when the Wolf Plan was adopted in 2005. In its 2010 review and update of the Wolf Plan, the Commission reconfirmed this approach for wolf management. Phase I is considered the “conservation phase” and includes a population objective of four breeding pairs of wolves in eastern Oregon for three consecutive years. In late January of this year the conservation objective was reached and ODFW entered Phase II of the Wolf Plan in eastern Oregon.

Upon entry into Phase II, the Wolf Plan directs ODFW to initiate proceedings to consider removing the gray wolf from the list of Oregon Endangered Species. Delisting a species from Oregon ESA (ORS 496.176) requires a public rulemaking decision by the Commission and this decision is to be made on the basis of scientific information and other biological data. Specifically, the Commission must evaluate the biological status of the species and determine if:

1. The species is not now (and is not likely in the foreseeable future to be) in danger of extinction in any significant portion of its range in Oregon or in danger of becoming endangered; and
2. The species’ natural reproductive potential is not in danger of

failure due to limited population numbers, disease, predation, or other natural or human-related factors affecting its continued existence; and

3. Most populations are not undergoing imminent or active deterioration of range or primary habitat; and
4. Over-utilization of the species or its habitat for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes is not occurring or likely to occur; and
5. Existing state or federal programs or regulations are adequate to protect the species and its habitat.

The draft biological status review in this packet (Attachment 2) contains information related to these criteria. A significant portion of the analysis (esp. Criterion 1 & 2) is contained as separate reports in Appendix' A & B of the biological status review.

As predicted when the Wolf Plan was developed, wolves have now become established in Oregon and have increased in both distribution and abundance from 2008-2014. The analysis of future population growth using conservative parameter inputs indicates a high probability that Oregon's wolf population will remain extant in future years. There is a low probability of decline below conservation levels, and most of our simulated failures occurred within the first 10 years of simulation when the population is lowest. However, factors related to wolf health, habitat, dispersal, habitat connectivity, and wolf survival all indicate a healthy and growing population.

Wolves still occupy a relatively small portion of the estimated potential range in Oregon. However, they are represented within both east and west management zones and there are no known conditions which prevent wolves from occupying currently unoccupied areas of range. This situation was accurately predicted by the Commission when the 2005 Oregon Wolf Plan was adopted and the decision to divide the state into two management zones was a tacit effort to provide the flexibility needed to manage increasing numbers of wolves in eastern Oregon while maintaining conservation measures for colonizing sub-populations in western Oregon. The Commission's authority to manage the wolves as separate groups, or with different management goals applying in different areas is distinct from the Commission's authority to list or delist the wolves under the OESA.

When evaluating the threat of extinction in Oregon's potential and current wolf range we considered that: 1) wolves were once extirpated as a result of historical efforts to eradicate them, and now in absence of those efforts and under current management frameworks, are increasing in abundance and distribution, 2) there are no known conditions, which prevent wolves from inhabiting currently unoccupied portions of range in Oregon, 3) observed movement and dispersal patterns indicate connectivity from source populations, and 4) the probability of extinction in Oregon is low.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to initiate rulemaking to remove the wolf from the List of Oregon Endangered Species.
2. No action.

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

While this briefing is primarily informational, staff recommends that the Commission determine significant information exists to justify initiating rulemaking to remove the gray wolf from the Oregon List of Endangered Species.

DRAFT MOTION

I move to determine that significant information exists to justify initiating rulemaking to remove the wolf from the List of Endangered Species under the Oregon Endangered Species Act.

EFFECTIVE DATE