

## 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 part of the Commission process to consider the state listing status of wolves, staff will present a draft report titled "Updated 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

#### UPDATED 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 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 updated 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. These documents are similar to the version which was presented to the Commission on April 24, 2015. Differences between the two documents include:

1. Updated analysis to reflect a current population of 85 wolves (not including pups of the year) in 16 groups or packs.
2. Updated analysis to reflect 10 packs and 9 breeding pairs occurred in 2014, based on new late winter information.
3. Included information and discussion of genetic origin and health of Oregon wolves in relation to public comments received at the April 24, 2015 Commission meeting
4. Updated distribution and dispersal information.
5. Revised population viability and range analysis using current (July) information.
6. A specific eastern Wolf Management Zone population viability analysis and 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 to present. 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 very 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.

In the included draft biological status review (Attachment 2) document we evaluated the status of wolves as related to each of the delisting criteria above for the entire state (Part 1), and also for the eastern Wolf Management Zone (WMZ) only (Part 2). Our evaluation resulted in the conclusions 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 or within the eastern WMZ; 3) observed movement and dispersal patterns indicate connectivity from source populations and 4) the probability of population failure is very low.

We also included analysis and discussion (Part 3) regarding the biological implications of wolves remaining listed as endangered in Oregon.

## **OPTIONS**

1. Initiate rulemaking to remove the wolf from the List of Oregon Endangered Species.
2. Initiate rulemaking to remove the wolf from the List of Oregon Endangered Species within the eastern Wolf Management Zone only.
3. No action.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

This briefing is informational only.

**DRAFT MOTION**

**EFFECTIVE DATE**