

Director's Report

Wolf Plan Review Panel #2

March 18, 2018

WOLVES IN OREGON

Wolf Plan Revision: Sportsmen's Concerns



Presented by Jim Akenson, OHA Conservation Director

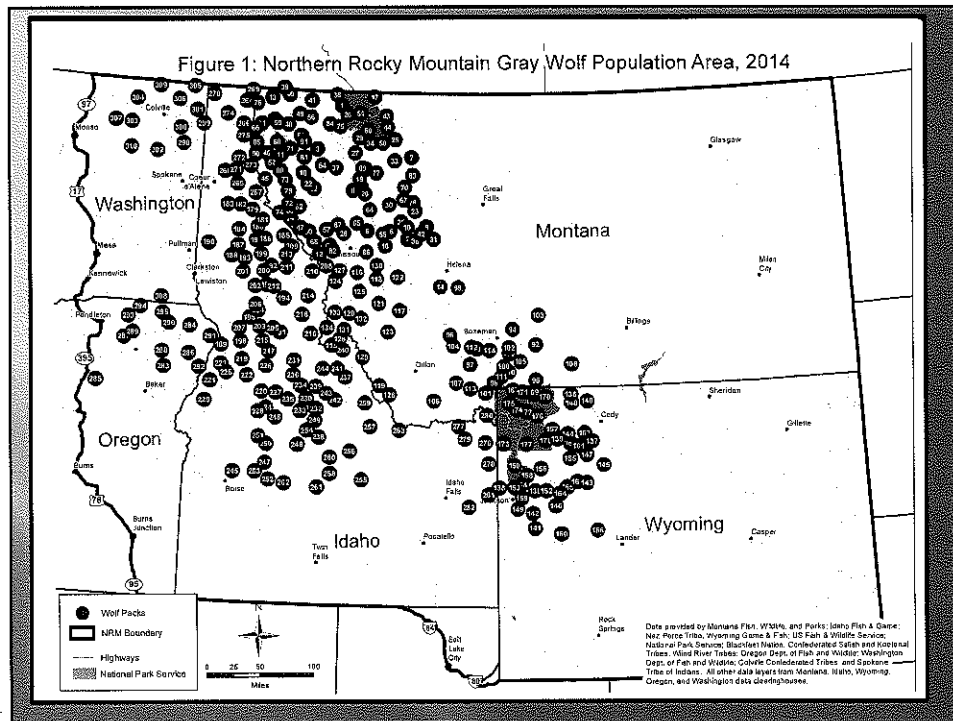
OHA POSITION



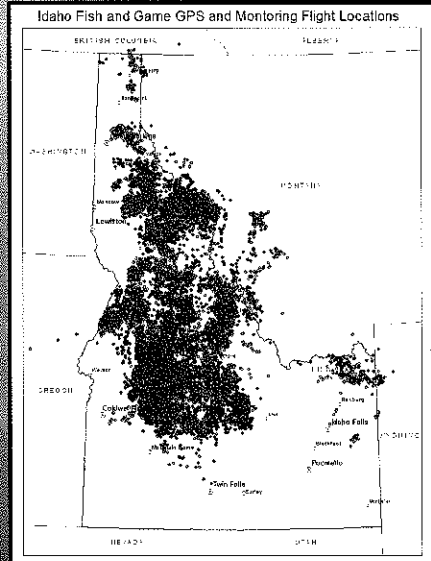
"It is time to delist wolves in Oregon. They have met and exceeded the scientific criteria identified in the Oregon Wolf Management Plan. Oregon sportsmen, as voiced by OHA, want to see the Plan followed"

Current Wolf Plan and Next Wolf Plan

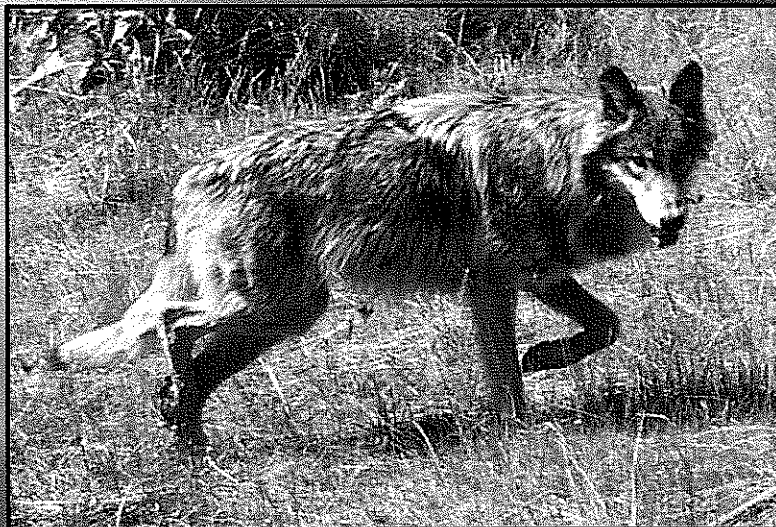
BOTH - Have and will outline specific and cautious conservation measures for this species in Oregon, and will carry on the three-phased approach to management... with strict population criteria as we progress from one phase to the next.



Learning from our neighbors



Incredible dispersal - >350 miles



Idaho Wolf Research > 10 years



Plan Considerations: Approaching Phase III

- ❑ Assumption: monitoring actual numbers will become increasingly difficult. Collaring objectives should be stated in Plan - such as half (50%) of packs with one collar deployed moving through Phase II.
- ❑ Consideration for ungulate prey species will be an important objective moving into Phase III
- ❑ "Extremely unlikely (≤ 0.01 probability) that wolves in Oregon will be at risk of extirpation over next 50 years" Yet, OHA supports the protective measures outlined for Phases I & II of the Plan.
- (Especially considering dispersal from the NRM meta-population).

Specific Plan Items to Address:

- ❑ Pg. 34. "As wolves become established in the state, wolf managers will be collecting data on wolf movements, pack home ranges, and other population parameters. This information, coupled with data regarding wolf conflicts, could be used to set maximum numbers in the future"
- ❑ This statement needs clear language with established wolf target #'s per area (WMU's) and an action plan for implementation in the revision

Specific Plan Items, Continued:

- ❑ Pg. 51 "Emphasis may be put on lethal control (of wolves) to ensure protections of livestock.
- ❑ In areas where chronic wolf problems are occurring, wolf managers may seek assistance from private citizens through special permits for controlling take to resolve conflict"
- ❑ The revised plan needs to consider and establish criteria on both localized livestock damage occurrence and wolf population - to determine if controlled hunting can serve as a management tool in Phase III.

Strategies: Wolf – Ungulate Interactions

- ❑ “Active management will be initiated in areas where ungulate species have been transplanted to supplement or expand their historic range.
- ❑ “Active management of wolves may be initiated in important winter ranges and feeding sites.”
- ❑ The plan revision needs to address these issues and expand the action oriented language.

Conclusions:

Plan Revision and Phase II – III

- ❑ The wolf population is robust: with 36% increase last year – now minimum of 110.
- ❑ For comparison: Idaho - 114 ('98) to 289 ('02) to 764 ('07). 856 ('09) Limited hunting/trapping ('10)...down to 777 in 2010 and 770 est. for 2014.
- ❑ OHA wants to see the next plan be respectful of the species existence, yet protective of our opportunities to hunt big game, protect our property, rural life-style, and local economy. This will ultimately entail *wolf number management!*

Probable or Confirmed?

Todd Nash
OCA Wolf Committee Chair
Enterprise, OR

Evidence May 13, 2015

- ❑ Wolf collar download showed OR33 within a small polygon next to ranch house
 - Message came at 6:30
 - Todd called Porters at 6:45
 - Porters investigated and found dying calf at 7:00
- ❑ Carcass was new --- owner saw it take its last breath
- ❑ Porters returned call at 7:00
- ❑ Discussed whether it "is even worth calling in"
 - Todd supported calling (should be an easy call)

Evidence Continued

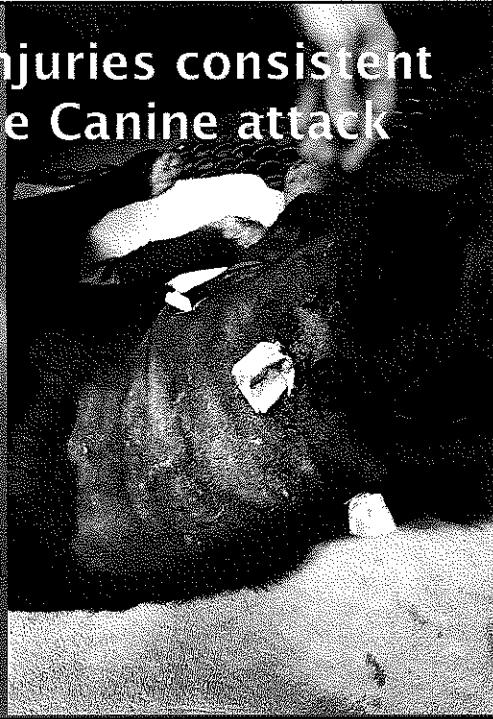
- ▣ At investigation with ODFW
 - Sherriff/Wildlife service/OCA wolf chair/rancher present
- ▣ 275 lb calf was killed
- ▣ Wolf tracks and scat found within 30 yards
- ▣ Skid mark where cows had been run
- ▣ Teeth marks with trauma
 - Both Wolf and Coyote
 - No classic coyote kill marks such as under throat
 - Were classic wolf bites in fore arm, flank and hind quarters.

Eric Porter May 13, 2015
Probable/not confirmed



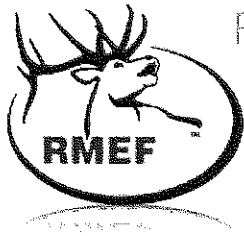
Veterinarian—injuries consistent with very large Canine attack

- ❑ August 2015
 - ❑ 1 black wolf sited
 - Numerous times
 - ❑ 2 dogs injured
 - ❑ 2 dogs missing
 - ❑ 1 dog permanent injury
- Probable not confirmed



Questions?





ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION

March 14, 2016

Chairman Michael Finley
Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE
Salem, OR 97392
E-mail: odfw.comments@state.or.us; odfw.commission@coho2.dfw.state.or.us

Re: Review of the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan

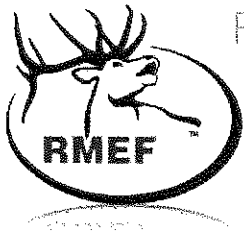
Chair Finley and Members of the Commission:

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) is honored to have been invited to review and comment on the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. Wolves have now been removed from the Oregon Endangered Species List, and we congratulate the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) on the successful restoration of the gray wolf to the Oregon landscape. This achievement would not have been possible without an effective plan and thoughtful implementation by a staff of consummate wildlife management professionals.

The Plan was written more than 10 years ago, before wolves were present in the state. It was based on sound science and the experiences of other western states with rapidly growing reintroduced wolf populations. Many assumptions were necessary and appropriate at the time. The Plan has proven very effective in guiding the reestablishment of the gray wolf. However, as Oregon approaches the time to transition from population establishment to population management, it is now time to review the program and analyze collected data to develop a vision of how the program moves forward.

Oregon's wolf population is growing exponentially and expanding its range across the state. The 2015 Wolf Status Report indicates an actual count of 110 wolves comprised of 12 packs, 11 packs qualified as breeding pairs, plus 4 additional pairs of wolves. The 2015 population growth rate is reported at a 36% increase over the previous year. Wolves are now well established in north east Oregon and south west Oregon, and their dispersal movements have been documented by GPS location across Oregon east of the Cascade crest. That portion of the Plan related to the re-establishment of a wolf population has undeniably proven effective. The current Plan's capacity to manage a rapidly growing wolf population is an open question.

We suggest it is now necessary and appropriate to examine the adequacy of the Plan's direction for management of the wolf population based upon Oregon's own wolf data and experiences, along with an ever increasing body of wolf management science and the experiences of other



western states with more advanced wolf populations – Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. Managing the wolf population in concert with the populations of other predators – cougar and black-bear – and their cumulative impacts upon their prey base of elk and deer must be carefully orchestrated. Plan actions in response to livestock depredation and human safety must also be scrutinized to ensure effective response.

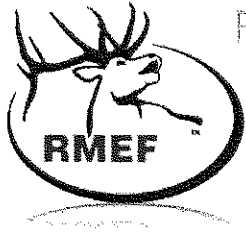
Predator prey selection research is vital to understanding and regulating the population levels for predators, including human harvest, which the deer and elk prey base can sustain and remain healthy and viable. Oregon, to its credit, has ongoing cougar and wolf predator prey selection research which has and is producing valuable insight from which management direction may be derived. The 2015 Wolf Status Report summarizes some of the information, and research requirements should continue to be addressed in the Plan.

The time is fast approaching when Oregon's wolf population will be so large that it will not be possible to have a GPS collar on a wolf in every pack or pair. The revised Plan should address how the wolf population will be estimated when it is no longer practical to use GPS collars to locate the wolf packs for counting of individuals.

We know the new Plan will be based on the latest science and learned experiences. We are concerned about the workload of the two person staff that has handled the program to this point, and would ask that you evaluate that part of the program. We are also aware that a lot of assistance to the wolf program comes from the management biologists and other staff, and it appears that their costs are not included in the wolf program costs. It seems to us that this cost needs to be recognized. We also encourage an assessment to determine if the contribution of the management biologists might be taking away from their responsibilities to the prey species, i.e. deer and elk management.

Hunter-conservationist contributions to wildlife conservation are not always well understood by the public. However it is no secret to ODFW, which is funded primarily through hunting and fishing license sales and federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment sales that are distributed to the state based on the sale of those licenses. In addition to the license fees and expenditures that they incur pursuing these activities, many hunters and anglers belong to conservation organizations that raise millions of dollars to help state wildlife agencies and federal land management agencies better manage habitat and wildlife species through grants, volunteer projects, and political support of their programs. Hunter-conservationists care about healthy habitats and all the wildlife species that they support.

Predators require a healthy ungulate population, which requires ODFW to manage elk and deer for optimum numbers to meet predator needs, while also allowing a surplus of elk and deer for hunters to pursue and wildlife watchers to view. Prey animals require healthy habitat, and it is incumbent upon ODFW to work with federal land managers, state land managers, and private



ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION

landowners to achieve this goal. The trick is to manage habitat, prey, and predators so that all can thrive. The key is to bring about a balance with realistic plans based on the latest available science.

Founded over 30 years ago, RMEF is a non-profit wildlife conservation organization fueled by hunters and a membership of nearly 220,000 strong. RMEF's mission is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat, and our hunting heritage. Nationwide RMEF has conserved more than 6.7 million acres of quality habitat for elk and other wildlife. In Oregon RMEF has helped fund 814 projects which enhanced more than 714,000 acres of wildlife habitat and permanently protected another 60,000 acres. We also work to open and improve public access, fund and advocate for science-based resource management, and ensure the future of America's hunting heritage.

Sincerely,

M. David Allen
President & CEO



OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

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March 16, 2016

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

RE: Review of the Oregon Wolf and Conservation Plan

Dear Chair Finley and the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission:

The Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide input on revising the Oregon Wolf and Conservation Plan. OHA has been an advocate of this plan since the original completion in 2005 and revision in 2010, and now with wolves delisted and well established in Oregon, we take this input opportunity very seriously. Restoring wolves to Oregon has been highly controversial. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) did an excellent job of following the plan and implementing the provisions described in the three-phased management strategy which has allowed this species to re-establish in ever increasing parts of our state.

We understand that this input opportunity is specific to the Wolf Plan revision so our comments will be directed accordingly, and focus on phase II and III language from the Plan. The Plan did an excellent job of anticipating the situation to this point in time, however, the present-day situation needs consideration as we move towards Phase III, or the wolf management phase for wolf re-establishment in Oregon. With the 2015 wolf report showing a 36% annual growth rate, and a total minimum number of 110, it is apparent that Phase III population conditions will be here sooner rather than later.

OHA's Primary Points of Concern and Consideration:

The Plan revision needs to clearly identify the transition from Phase II to Phase III, and develop language to support the intention of Phase III – which is management of this species to be consistent with the other economic and recreational interests of the state.

- Phase II considers breeding pair thresholds but does not establish **maximum numbers** per district, region, or grouping of Wildlife Management Units **within a given watershed**. Many factors should be considered with this process, including ungulate population variables and livestock depredation. Page 34 from the current Plan states, "As wolves become established in the state, wolf managers will be collecting data on wolf movements, pack home ranges, and other population parameters. This information coupled with data regarding wolf conflicts, could be used to set maximum population levels in the future."
- The next round of planning will need to **address hunting as a management tool** since wolves are considered a special-status mammal within the game mammal category "once the wolf population objectives have been exceeded." Under the heading of "Wolf Legal Status," controlled take would be authorized as a **response to chronic livestock depredation** or wild ungulate populations experiencing



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either population or recruitment declines. Pertinent language, including guidelines and threshold triggers, need to be established for Phase III.

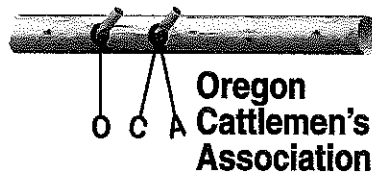
- Page 51 of the Plan states that upon reaching Phase III, “emphasis may be put on lethal control (of wolves) to ensure protection of livestock. **In areas where chronic wolf problems are occurring**, wolf managers may seek assistance from **private citizens through special permits for controlled take to resolve conflict.**” The new plan needs to establish harvest criteria, and have action triggers based on both wolf population size and damage occurrence.
- Under the Plan section titled, “Strategies to Address Wolf-Ungulate Interactions” there is a need for language development for specific ungulate species, and the appropriate action taken. The current language states: “**Active management (e.g. non-lethal or lethal removal) of wolves will be initiated in areas where ungulate species have been transplanted** to supplement or expand their historic range, and if wolves are determined to be affecting the success of the transplant goal.” An example would be in the case of bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and moose transplants.
- Similar language needs to be developed for common ungulate species valued by hunters, such as deer and elk, when they are seasonally concentrated. The Plan does address this by saying, “**Active management of wolves may be initiated in important winter ranges or winter feeding sites that serve to draw ungulates away from agricultural lands.** These sites may attract wolves and could cause them to abandon them in some circumstances.” More specific language is needed, including the recognition of critical sites: The Wenaha and Elkhorn Management Areas are examples.

OHA feels that it is important to maintain a balance between a rapidly expanding wolf population and the traditional, and highly cherished, resource uses of this great state. The original Wolf Plan was an excellent start and it carried us through nicely until this point in time. In looking at neighboring states, specifically Idaho, a very similar pattern of wolf population growth occurred. Idaho exceeded a desirable population threshold and implemented active management, again with other important interests in mind, and now they have leveled off at population numbers that seem to be in balance with other statewide interests including hunting and livestock production. Our scale of acceptance is different in Oregon, primarily because we have a large part of our rural landscape which intertwines livestock grazing and wild ungulate populations. Additionally, and given the current rapid expansion of wolves in Oregon, OHA is recommending a revision of the next planning cycle in 2020. It is vitally important that management stays abreast with wolf population expansion.

Thank you very much for this input opportunity!

Sincerely,

Jim Akenson
OHA, Conservation Director



Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission
March 18, 2016
Summary of Panel 2 Recommendations

Chair Finley and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide initial comments to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission regarding the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan ("Wolf Plan") for the upcoming five-year review taking place later this year. The Oregon Cattlemen's Association (OCA), Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) and Oregon Hunters' Association (OHA) appreciate the work of the Commission and Department on this important issue and look forward to participating in the upcoming review process.

We submit the following initial recommendations for modification to the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan for the Commission's consideration as we move forward with the 2016 five-year review:

1. **Establish Wolf Management Areas and Population Objectives:** OCA, OFB and OHA propose creating wolf management areas or zones with set population objectives within each zone.
2. **Improve Process of Depredation:**
 - a. OCA and OFB propose a change in the process of confirming wolf depredations to allow two probable depredation calls to equal one confirmed depredation event.
 - b. OCA and OFB propose a modification to the appeal process to allow for independent review of the Department's depredation determination by a third party.
 - c. OFB proposes increased flexibility around lethal take.
3. **Collar at least 50% of Packs:** OCA and OFB propose collaring at least 50% of the wolf packs as we move into Phase III with a priority around packs that are likely to have conflict with livestock.
4. **Simplify Management:** OHA proposes simplification of management actions for district offices to reduce the burden and cost of wolf management for district biologists.
5. **Controlled Hunts:** As we move into Phase III and wolves exceed population objectives, OHA suggests hunts in specific pack areas with a priority toward livestock depredation and areas with a documented declines in game populations.
6. **Review Stay on Track:** OCA and OHA suggest that the five year reviews should stay on track with the next Wolf Plan review beginning in 2020.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact Jim Akenson (jim@oregonhunters.org), Todd Nash (toddpnash@gmail.com) or Mary Anne Nash (maryanne@oregonfb.org) with any questions.