

Oregon Wolf Program Update

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Reports of Wolf Activity: 30 wolf reports were received by ODFW during September. Five wolf reports were from the west wolf management zone (4 sighting reports, 1 scat report), and 25 from the east zone (10 sighting reports, 9 track/scat reports, 6 howling reports).

Field Investigations/Monitoring/Capture:

Imnaha Pack: ODFW continues to monitor the Imnaha pack with GPS radio-collar locations every three hours. The two GPS radio-collars (OR4 and OR7) recorded 301 GPS location data points in September. The pack continues to spend the majority of its time on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and Hells Canyon National Recreation Area with 219 (73%) of the GPS locations. The pack shifted to spending more time on private land than it did in August; 27% of September locations were on private land compared to 4% in August. The pack continued to use two counties, 253 (84%) locations were in Wallowa County and 48 (16%) were in Baker County. Observation data and photographic evidence collected by ODFW continues to show the pack consists of OR4, OR2 (alpha female), an uncollared sub-adult and one pup. (While it is possible that other wolves could be present but unaccounted for, ODFW only presents wolf information which is based on actual evidence like tracks or trail camera footage.) Four radio-collared members of the Imnaha pack have now dispersed from the pack since December 2010 – OR3, OR5, OR7, and OR9. OR5 was last found in Washington and OR9 dispersed to Idaho.

OR7: A 2 ½-year-old male, dispersed from the Imnaha pack on Sept. 10. OR7 has a GPS radio-collar and ODFW was able to track his route as he crossed through the Eagle Cap Wilderness of the Wallowa Mountains, crossed the Keating valley to Lookout Mountain, and then continued to the southwest corner of Baker County by the end of the month. One flight was made and three personnel days were spent to determine if OR7 was alone. However, no visual observations of OR7 were made.

OR3: All or part of four personnel days and two flights were made by ODFW attempting to locate the 3½-year-old radio-collared wolf OR3 that dispersed from the Imnaha pack in May. He was located both times east of Fossil on private forestland near the US Forest Service boundary. District staff tried to get a visual from the ground, but were unable to, due to topography, brush and inability to access the area. There was no visual sighting so it is unknown if he is alone or is with other wolves. On Sept. 30, the USFWS conducted a flight to locate OR3; he was found northeast of Prineville in the Grizzly Unit of the Ochoco Mountains. He had moved southwest more than 40 miles.

Wenaha Pack: ODFW conducted wolf surveys in the Wenaha Unit on seven days during the month. Wolf tracks and scat were observed on four of those days. Reproduction has not yet been confirmed in the Wenaha pack this year. However, surveys have not been completed.

Walla Walla Unit: All or part of seven personnel days were spent monitoring wolf activity in the Walla Walla Unit. A livestock producer captured pictures of two pups and at least two adults on his personal trail camera. ODFW continued to find tracks, scat and captured photographs of at least four wolves, one of them confirmed as a pup during September. The confirmation of successful reproduction in this pack is further evidence that wolves are expanding their range in Oregon. If at least two pups survive to the end of 2011, this pack will be classified as a breeding pair for 2011.

Mt Emily Unit: One day was spent investigating a wolf report in the southern portion of the Mt Emily Unit, no wolf sign was found. All or part of 22 personnel days were spent investigating in the northern part of the Mt Emily Unit – north of the Umatilla River. Staff continued to find sign of two adult wolves throughout September. ODFW attempted to capture and radio collar a wolf in this area but was unsuccessful.

Ukiah Unit: Three days were spent surveying for wolf sign in response to a public wolf report. No wolf sign was found.

Catherine Creek: One day was spent surveying for wolf sign in response to a public wolf report. No wolf sign was found.

Aerial Monitoring: Six aerial flights were conducted by ODFW in September. Two were conducted to monitor OR3 (noted above) and one was to monitor OR7. Three flights were conducted to locate the Imnaha pack in association with lethal control actions (see below).

Livestock Depredation, Investigations, and Livestock Producer Assistance:

ODFW performed five wolf depredation investigations during the month in Wallowa County and one in Umatilla County. One wolf depredation was confirmed during September on a calf on private land in the Imnaha pack area. Also in September, a cow was determined to be a probable depredation by wolves on a USFS allotment in Wallowa County. This is the first time a wolf has been implicated in a depredation on public lands. A summary of each investigation can be viewed at the following link http://www.dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/livestock_loss_investigations.asp.

Non lethal/preventative actions: The range rider program was continued in September through a direct agreement between an area livestock producer and Defenders of Wildlife. The range rider actively monitors wolves, patrols livestock and hazes wolves from livestock where necessary. ODFW continued to send text messages on at least 22 days in the month of September to Wallowa county livestock producers with livestock in the area of the Imnaha pack. During the month at least 227 text messages were sent.

Lethal Control:

On Sept. 22, ODFW confirmed a livestock depredation of a calf on private land in the Imnaha pack area. The Wolf Plan states that "In situations where chronic losses are occurring, lethal control actions may be employed to minimize livestock losses regardless of the wolf population status". OAR 635 110(10)(6) allows for lethal removal of wolves to deal with chronic depredation if ODFW confirms two depredations by wolves on livestock in the area. This depredation marks the 15th ODFW (or USFWS) confirmed depredation by the Imnaha pack. There is indication the pack will continue to prey on livestock in this part of the Wallowa Valley. While non-lethal control techniques will help some, it is unlikely these techniques will eliminate the depredation risk to livestock. OR4 (alpha male) was determined to be present at the depredation site. In response to this chronic depredation situation ODFW again initiated lethal removal efforts on Sept. 24, 2011. This lethal action was targeted at the alpha male and a sub-adult. At the end of the month, no wolves had been removed as a result of this action.