

WDFW 2018 GRAZING SEASON ODSERVATIONS

April 20, 2019

At the December 2018 Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) meeting, WAG members asked WDFW staff for their perspective on what worked and did not work during the 2018 grazing season. As requested, the department's Wolf Internal Group (WIG) met and developed a list of items to share with the WAG and public at the February 2019 meeting. Unfortunately, that meeting was cancelled due to winter weather conditions.

While Department staff would prefer to meet in person to discuss this, the 2019 grazing season starts soon and compiling these thoughts cannot wait. As a result, this document was made in preparation for the April 24-25 WAG meeting.

What Worked

1. District 3 use of range riders and removing livestock carcasses.
2. Communicating with a County Commissioner Andy Hover as soon as staff learned about a woman who climbed a tree to avoid wolves.
3. Olympia-based staff providing fladry when District 1 needed it.
4. Hiring an additional wolf biologist to build relationships with livestock producers and assist staff.
5. Making Wolf 101 presentations to county commissioners.

What Didn't Work or Needs Improvement

1. Setting expectations for range riders. Adding expectations that range riders can move livestock, remove carcasses, use additional nonlethal means to avoid depredation, respond to conflict specialist direction, use GPS, and more should be considered.
2. Communication with producers to help them better understand staff roles and responsibilities.
3. Communication with the Department of Natural Resources, the US Forest Service, and the sheriff's department during an incident where a woman climbed a tree to avoid wolves.
4. The use of nonlethal means (fox lights, range riding, night penning, keeping sheep tightly together) may not be effective in keeping wolves from the Teanaway pack away from sheep.
5. Additional proactive data collection is needed on pack size and composition for packs that depredate livestock.
6. Staff stringing fladry without the producer present.

What Was New in 2018

1. Time needed for litigation took time away from the other job duties.
2. Livestock left on public grazing lands after the allotted time were preyed on by wolves.

3. Managing three lethal removal situations at one time with limited resources. In the future, how will we determine where to send our crews, and when?
4. If staff concludes nonlethal means aren't working, are staff and/or producers still required to use them, even if it is not an ideal use of resources?

2019 New Developments

1. ESHB 2097 stating that "The department shall implement conflict mitigation guidelines that distinguish between wolf recovery regions, identified in the 2011 wolf conservation and management plan, that are at or above the regional recovery objective and wolf recovery regions that are below the regional recovery objective. In developing conflict management guidelines, the department shall consider the provisions of its 2011 wolf recovery and management plan, and all regional plans must include proactive nonlethal deterrents regardless of listing status". The bill has passed the House and Senate chambers.
2. A March 15, 2019, proposal published by the United State Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to federally delist gray wolves in the lower 48 states. Under the proposal, wolves in the western two-thirds of Washington (i.e., west of the Eastern Washington recovery region in the figure below) would be federally delisted and the entire state's wolf population would be managed by WDFW, except for tribal reservations (see March wolf update).
3. The Colville Confederated Tribes' February 22, 2019 announcement that wolf-hunting season in the North and South half of the reservation is open only to tribal members, and is open year-round with unlimited take in 2019 (see March wolf update).

DRAFT CONCEPTS FOR POTENTIAL CHANGES TO WDFW WOLF-LIVESTOCK INTERACTIONS PROTOCOL

The following draft concepts were developed using the “What Worked” and “What Didn’t Work” items above and related to ESHB 2097. Consider these as brainstorming ideas that are meant to help facilitate the ongoing discussions and preparation for the April 24-25 WAG meeting.

1. Range rider duties

A major objective for range riding is to increase the frequency of human presence around livestock to deter wolf activity. To be effective, range riders need to be ready to intercept wolves coming into the herd/flock. Wolves are naturally curious and do not always run at the first sign of humans. Wolves that frequent livestock grazing areas need to be taught to associate livestock with people and people with negative consequences. The negative association is similar to when WDFW releases nuisance bears, using rubber bullets, noise, and dogs to haze them and deter them from returning to the area.

Staying with the livestock is the best approach for teaching wolves the negative connection with livestock and people. Wolves can move faster than people and can circle back to a herd of livestock when a range rider chases them off and follows them. Or, other pack members may approach the herd while the range rider is away.

Range riding doesn’t require a radio-collared wolf to be successful. Radio collars make locating wolves easier; but wolves do not always stay together. As the wolf population increases, a smaller percentage of wolves will carry radio collars. Range riders should concentrate monitoring activities on looking for predator sign in areas where livestock are showing agitation and stress. They should count livestock regularly, note any missing, injured, or dead livestock and remove carcasses.

Range riders and the producers whose herds are being watched should work together to make range riding as effective as possible. Components of effective range riding include:

- Ability to move sick and injured livestock, move livestock away from den and rendezvous sites, move livestock to appropriate pastures, and move livestock in small-localized movements relative to wolf activity (move cows away from wolf activity, including wolf sign).
- Group the livestock if allowed by annual operating instructions. The entire herd does not need to be together but at a minimum keep cow-calf pairs together; and make small groups of cow-calf pairs to develop their herding instincts.
- Focus on staying with livestock to deter wolf-livestock interactions rather than following wolves or visiting all GPS cluster sites. A GPS cluster site may indicate which herd(s) range riders should increase their vigilance around and/or may indicate if a range rider should move livestock out of the area.
- Assisting with carcass removal and using non-lethal measures.
- Use of the most effectual equipment, regardless of payment scale.

- Use of a GPS to document their daily tracking log.
- Keeping detailed and accurate notes, and provide those records to WDFW as needed/requested.
- Note – The priority for WDFW contracted range riders is focusing on public grazing allotments as directed by the local Conflict Specialists.

2. Use of Applicable Non-Lethal Deterrents

After another year of using non-lethal deterrents on wolves in northeast Washington, several lessons have emerged. As we have learned from other states and locations and our own experiences, being selective and mindful of which deterrents to use with each circumstance is imperative in having the highest likelihood of reducing potential wolf-livestock interactions. Some knowingly ineffective deterrents have been used to show that all options were tried. Unfortunately, these reactive decisions can have detrimental effects on future deterrent effectiveness or waste the time of staff, producers and/or range riders. Some examples of when deterrents were used needlessly are below (this is not an inclusive list).

- Four fox lights were placed within a several thousand-acre allotment grazed by cattle at salting locations. Fox light effectiveness is anecdotal at this time; however, limited use in Washington with collared wolves in an area may suggest that these deterrents work well in small fenced locations or possibly on large grazing locations with sheep where they can be bunched at night. With any non-lethal deterrent associated with wolves, overexposure can reduce the deterrent's effectiveness.
- The use of fladry around a cow carcass in a remote location with bear activity. Fladry was placed around a carcass that could not be removed due to size and terrain. Cattle had been moved out of the immediate area and bear scat was already noted. Use of fladry around secured locations (e.g., small pastures) can be effective for short periods of time. However, using fladry in an area where bears have been noted and wolves frequent can decrease the effectiveness of this deterrent. For example, placing a highly desired food reward within a small fladry area can encourage wolves to cross that barrier. In another instance, a bear, not being deterred by fladry, pulled a carcass outside of the fladry and wolves fed on it.
- Staff hazing of wolves. Effective hazing can change behavior, not usage of a territory. Aversive conditioning, which hazing is sometimes mistaken for, requires catching wildlife in the act of an undesired behavior and correcting them with negative stimuli (e.g., non-lethal munitions). This method has been documented to be effective in bears (not wolves) and wolves are rarely encountered committing this behavior. Use of hazing as a deterrent may use a large amounts of staff time without changing wolf behavior.

3. Conflict mitigation guidelines that distinguish between 1) wolf recovery regions that are at or above the regional recovery objective, and 2) wolf recovery regions that are below the regional recovery objective

The wolf conservation and management plan and wolf-livestock interactions protocol provide some guidance:

- Any wolf-livestock management program should manage conflicts in a way that gives livestock owners experiencing losses the tools to minimize losses, while at the same time not harming the recovery or long-term sustainability of wolf populations.
- Management approaches are based on the status of wolves, ensuring that recovery objectives are met.
- Lethal control will be used only as needed after case-specific evaluations are made, with use becoming less restrictive as wolves progress toward delisting.
- The lethal removal of wolves is not expected to harm the wolf population's ability to reach recovery objectives statewide or within individual wolf recovery regions.
- Conflict mitigation tools such as non-lethal injurious harassment and lethal removal are more limited when the wolf population is far from recovery. They become more liberal as the population is closer to recovery. In the plan, that transition goes from endangered, to threatened, to sensitive listing statuses.
- If a situation were to occur where WDFW did not have the resources to address a situation of repeated depredations, WDFW may consider issuing a permit to a livestock owner (including family members and authorized employees) to conduct lethal control during a specific time period on private lands they own or lease.
- As wolves move to state sensitive and delisted status, WDFW may permit livestock owners (including their family members and authorized employees) to lethally control a limited number of wolves during a specific time period on private lands and public grazing allotments they own or lease.

Below are some draft concepts related to conflict mitigation guidelines that distinguish between wolf recovery regions that are at or above the regional recovery objective and wolf recovery regions that are below the regional recovery objective.

Statewide

- Monitor wolf mortality and population trends annually to help evaluate the potential impacts of lethal removals actions.
- Maintain breeding pairs above the regional recovery objective. Breeding pairs are the pumps for dispersal.
- Promote a multi-landowner (state and federal agencies, and private) collaborative process for reserve grazing areas.
- Use ground methods as the preferred method for lethal removal actions. However, in some cases the use of ground methods may not be effective or realistic, so the use helicopters on an as-needed basis.

- Streamline the payment process for contracted range riders and compensation to help expedite payments.
- Provide community leaders and elected officials a better understanding of agency activities and anticipated outcomes.

Regions that are at or above the regional recovery objective

- A possible consideration could include trapping and collaring wolves immediately after their first depredation. If it is the beginning of a pattern of depredations, the behavior may be limited to one or two pack members. The immediate action of trapping has the potential in itself to change behavior. Adding a collar helps understand composition and movements of the pack may help the effectiveness of non-lethal deterrents. If there is a second depredation (within a defined period or conditions), perhaps consider lethal removal if it is known which animals are depredating. These two efforts are meant to be coupled. This assumes the expectations for proactive non-lethal deterrents are met.
- A possible consideration could include encouraging more involvement by the affected livestock producer in lethal removal efforts. For example, in a situation where the department initiates lethal removal, consider allowing the producer to help the removal effort by issuing a permit.
- A possible consideration could include shifting (over time) the primary method for monitoring the local wolf population to using trail cameras, howling recordings, and track counts rather than collaring (except for trapping to collar immediately after a depredation). This would allow the department to increase collaring efforts in recovery regions below objective (where it is needed for recovery) while still being able to understand the local regions' population levels.
- Proactive analysis to assess if lethal removal of wolves is /is not expected to harm the wolf population's ability to reach recovery objectives statewide or in the specific wolf recovery region.

Regions that are below the regional recovery objective

- Increase collaring efforts to better monitor the local wolf population and dispersal.
- Proactive analysis to assess if lethal removal of wolves is /is not expected to harm the wolf population's ability to reach recovery objectives statewide or in the specific wolf recovery region.