

**To:** Oregon Legislators

**From:** Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Green Fire Productions, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, Oregon Chapter Sierra Club, Oregon Wild

**Date:** March 1, 2011

**Re:** Oregon gray wolves and impacts of legislation in the 76<sup>th</sup> session

## **History of Wolves in Oregon**

Prior to their systematic eradication, gray wolves were found throughout Oregon. Due to widely held beliefs that wolves and humanity could not co-exist, government agents and bounty hunters killed off the last wolf in Oregon in 1947 through an extermination program.

Currently, wolves are dispersing to Oregon following the reintroduction of 66 gray wolves into the central Idaho wilderness and Yellowstone National Park in 1995 and 1996, and their natural dispersal from Canada. By 1999 three wolves were known to have migrated into Oregon, compelling the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to work with a diverse group of stakeholders to create a gray wolf recovery and management plan. The plan outlined modest recovery objectives and was adopted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2005.

Today, three packs of gray wolves are known to roam eastern Oregon's wildlands and comprise approximately 24 individuals and 2 breeding pairs.

## **Bills Affecting Oregon Gray Wolves During the 76<sup>th</sup> Session**

Three bills currently before the legislature could affect Oregon's recovering gray wolf population. We expect additional bills to be introduced in the coming weeks. The majority of these bills would sidestep authorities in the stakeholder-created and recently updated Oregon Wolf Plan in order to streamline killing this endangered species. *It is critical Oregon's legislators defend the compromise Oregon Wolf Plan. The Plan just went through a mandated five-year review where adjustments were made to clarify any uncertainty. Legislative efforts to weaken the Oregon Wolf Plan must be opposed.*

**1. SB 583 – Sen. Whitsett** – The bill prohibits the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission from including the gray wolf on the list of threatened species or endangered species. *Since the Oregon Wolf Plan clearly outlines the benchmarks required to delist the species, we firmly reject this bill as it would undermine the stakeholder-created Oregon Wolf Plan and the state Endangered Species Act. With only two confirmed breeding pairs in the entire state, coupled with recent wolf poachings, the action is particularly inappropriate.*

**2. HB 3013 – Rep. G. Smith** – The bill directs the State Fish and Wildlife Commission to establish a wolf depredation compensation and cost-sharing program for the purpose of compensating persons who suffer livestock loss or injury due to wolf depredation. The bill also provides financial assistance to persons who implement livestock management techniques or non-lethal wolf control techniques designed to discourage wolf depredation of livestock. *The Oregon Wolf Plan calls for this type of compensation and conflict reduction legislation. We generally support an appropriate compensation program, as it tracks with what was called for in the Oregon Wolf Plan, with the caveats that it (a) should not include coverage for missing cattle, which is far too broad and will exhaust any compensation fund immediately; (b) should not allow for depredations to be confirmed by Wildlife Services, which is in direct conflict with the Oregon Wolf Plan's mandate for depredations to be confirmed by ODFW during Phases 1 and 2; (c) should require an application process for nonlethal deterrent funding that is overseen by ODFW that authorizes payment for new and effective nonlethal deterrents implemented to reduce wolf depredation conflicts; and (d) should require a claimant undergo a grazing practice analysis to ensure best animal husbandry practices are being utilized if a claim is filed.*

**3. HB 3561 – Rep. G. Smith** – The bill directs the State Fish and Wildlife Commission to update the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan to establish a population objective of four breeding pairs of gray wolves for the entire state. *Since the Oregon Wolf Plan clearly outlines previously agreed upon population objectives in both the eastern and western Oregon recovery zones, we firmly reject this bill as it would undermine the stakeholder-created Plan and the state Endangered Species Act. This bill would effectively cut in half the wolf population required for delisting outlined in the Oregon Wolf Plan.*

**4. Other bills undermining the Oregon Wolf Plan and public process** – While we have not yet seen exact language of other wolf legislation, we expect to see at least two additional anti-wolf bills:

- a. Authority for citizens to shoot wolves within 500 feet of a residence;
- b. Authority for citizens to shoot wolves that are chasing or harassing livestock (rather than the current requirement that wolves must be attacking livestock to be shot)

*We outright oppose these two bills. The Oregon Wolf Plan was developed with extensive participation and compromise by all stakeholders. Approving any measure such as these would undermine the entire multi-year Oregon Wolf Plan process, and the approval of that process by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission. These changes were proposed, discussed, and rejected by ODFW and the Wildlife Commission during the 5-year review of the Wolf Plan in October 2010. Additionally, all three bills would cause harm to the recovery of wolves in Oregon by reducing recovery numbers, cutting wildlife managers out of the decision-making process, making poaching laws effectively unenforceable, and making it easier to kill wolves.*

## **The Need to Be Proactive to Reduce Conflict**

We believe that for wolves to successfully recover in Oregon as outlined by the Oregon Wolf Plan, *proactive* actions to reduce wolf/livestock conflict must remain a priority. Conservation organizations, wildlife biologists and some ranching interests are working to implement proactive measures to reduce potential wolf-livestock conflict. Efforts such as educating ranchers about eliminating wolf attractants on the range by burying livestock carcasses and bone piles are underway. There is a collaboratively-funded position for a Ranger Rider to patrol the backcountry areas where livestock are known to be near wolves. Electric fladry, or flagging, is another non-lethal deterrent employed by wildlife agencies around livestock herds. Proactive solutions like these will be critical to reduce wolf-livestock conflict as wolves continue to recover across Oregon.

## **Room for Both**

We encourage you and your staff to preview the enclosed documentary, *Lords of Nature*, to better understand the gray wolf and its impact on communities and landscapes across America. We believe that there is room in Oregon for both wolves and humans to co-exist. Oregon should not repeat the mistakes of the past by ruthlessly killing off this native species. Their extermination was one of our state's great environmental tragedies, and their recovery has the potential to be one of our great conservation success stories.

## **For More Information**

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