

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Plan) and its associated administrative rules (Division 110) were adopted by the Commission in December 2005 and updated in 2010 and 2013. The Plan sets a conservation population objective of four breeding pairs of wolves in eastern Oregon for three consecutive years. Once this objective is achieved, the process to consider removing (delisting) the gray wolf from protection of the Oregon Endangered Species Act will be initiated.

Staff will provide an informational briefing on the upcoming issues of consideration for delisting wolves in Oregon.

The Commission has directed the department to review and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of the Plan every five years. The next evaluation needs to be initiated in 2015. The completion of any evaluation could result in a decision by the Commission to enter into rulemaking and amend the plan.

In response to recent concerns, staff will provide an informational briefing on program practices regarding public disclosure of “real time” wolf location information.

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

POTENTIAL DELISTING OF WOLVES IN OREGON

ISSUE 2

PROCESS AND TIMELINE FOR PLAN EVALUATION

ISSUE 3

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF WOLF LOCATION INFORMATION

ANALYSIS

Issue 1:

Oregon wolf population objectives were established using a 3-step phased approach when the Plan was adopted in 2005. In its 2010 review and update of the Plan, the Commission reconfirmed the three phase approach for wolf management. Phase 1 is considered the “conservation phase” and includes an objective of four breeding pairs of wolves in eastern Oregon for three consecutive years. Once that level is reached, the department is required to manage wolves under phase 2 of the Plan and Administrative Rules. Entering phase 2 does not require Commission action to implement, it simply occurs when the conservation population

objective is achieved.

Once the conservation objective is achieved the Plan states that the process to consider removing the gray wolf from the list of Oregon Endangered Species will be initiated. The Oregon Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires the Commission to base any delisting decision on scientific criteria related to the species' biological status in Oregon and to use documented and verifiable scientific information. The Plan was built to meet the following five delisting criteria identified in state statutes and administrative rules:

- 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
- 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
- Most populations are not undergoing imminent or active deterioration of range or primary habitat; and
- Over-utilization of the species or its habitat for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes is not occurring or likely to occur; and
- Existing state or federal programs or regulations are adequate to protect the species and its habitat.

2013 marked the second consecutive year with at least 4 breeding pairs of wolves in eastern Oregon. To date in 2014, staff has evidence of reproduction in 9 packs of wolves. Though official pup counts will not be completed until winter, staff is initiating preparations for the possibility that four or more successful breeding pairs will be documented and that the process of considering delisting may be initiated in 2015. These initial preparations include: 1) reviewing documented and verifiable scientific and other data; and 2) analyzing the scientific and other data and evaluating the findings using the ESA delisting criteria; and 3) setting timelines to complete the delisting consideration process.

If four or more breeding pairs of wolves are documented for the year 2014, staff will propose that the Commission initiate the process to consider delisting in 2015 using the following timeline: April, 2015 – staff proposal to consider delisting (no decision). May-June, 2015 – Revised proposal to consider delisting (potential decision).

Issue 2:

The current version of the Plan was adopted in October, 2010 with the next evaluation expected in 2015. Staff is considering options for completing an evaluation of the Plan during the same year that potential delisting of Oregon wolves may occur. Potential issues identified when planning for both processes include:

- Both the Plan evaluation and the delisting process are expected to generate a high level of public interest and input;
- Both processes will require extensive analysis, and will likely require Commission action at multiple meetings; and,
- Both processes will require extensive staff resources to complete.

The Plan was originally written as a conservation document while wolves were in Phase 1. The goal of the Plan is to “ensure the conservation of gray wolves as required by Oregon law while protecting the social and economic interests of all Oregonians.” It follows that much of the Plan’s current content is based on the listed status under the Oregon ESA. As stated above the process to consider delisting is expected to begin in early 2015 with a Commission determination expected in late summer.

The workload associated with concurrent delisting and Plan evaluation processes is expected to be high. Additionally, any decision the Commission makes on delisting could have a direct impact on changes to the Plan. The department is proposing the Commission address the question of the wolf’s listing status prior to the initiation of a formal Plan evaluation. Once the listed status of the wolf is determined, it is expected that the Plan and its evaluation will be more effectively targeted to management actions of Phase 2 of the Plan and beyond. This schedule will also allow the department to direct resources effectively for both these expected processes while continuing to implement on the ground wolf management. This means that the plan evaluation process will be expected to begin in the fall of 2015 at the earliest.

Issue 3

To assist with wolf-livestock conflicts, the Plan contains strategies to inform livestock producers of wolf presence in areas with wolves. In 2010 and 2011, the department provided regular information of wolf activity to producers in NE Oregon. However, the demand for collared wolf location information quickly became cumbersome, and in 2012 the department developed an automated system to more efficiently provide information.

The system utilizes GPS locations from collared wolves and notifies livestock producers (via text, email, or both) when wolves are in the area of their livestock. It does not give specific point location data but rather places the locations within predefined polygons which are known to the producers. Producers must have livestock in the area of collared wolves to be eligible to register to receive notification messages.

In 2013, more than 83,000 notification messages were sent to Oregon producers to inform them of wolf presence in the area of their livestock. 108 livestock producers in 3 counties received text or email wolf location notifications.

Initially, the notification system was considered an improvement by most producers who received it. However, the system has many limitations

(e.g., irregular data, collar failure/dispersal, untimely information), and concerns have been raised regarding the amount and type of wolf location data received. Specifically, the department has been requested to release point-location data from Oregon's GPS collared wolves to livestock producers.

The issue of public distribution of collared wildlife locations is complex and has many considerations, at both the policy and biological levels. The department will brief the Commission on current practices and ramifications of providing point locations of wolves.

OPTIONS

N/A

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

Informational only. No action requested at this time.

DRAFT MOTION

EFFECTIVE DATE