

MEETING REPORT
UTAH WOLF WORKING GROUP (WWG)
Meeting #10
28 September 2004
DNR Room 1050; Salt Lake City, UT

PARTICIPANTS:

Trey Simmons, Debbie Goodman, Robert Schmidt, Sterling Brown (alternate), Allison Jones, Don Peay, Randy Simmons, Clark Willis, Bill Fenimore (for Bill Burbridge), Lee Howard (alternate)

Missing: Mark Walsh, Karen Corts, Bill Christensen

Technical Advisors: Kevin Bunnell, Mike Bodenchuk, Laura Romin

Alternates: Kirk Robinson, Byron Bateman

Others: Joan DiGiorgio, Cindee Jensen, Mike Medberry

Facilitator: Walt Gasson - Dynamic Solutions Group, LLC

Recorder: Dana Dolsen, UDWR

DECISIONS AND ACTION ITEMS

The August meeting record will be posted on the web site immediately.

Walt will contact Karen Corts and discuss with her the importance of her active involvement, as a representative of the Ute Tribe, in this process.

Walt will get the draft meeting record from today out for review by October 12. Comments on the draft are due to him by October 21.

The Funding subgroup presented their bullet points. They were discussed and modified, but not approved. These bullet points must be approved by the WWG at the October 26 meeting.

The Objectives subgroup presented their draft purpose, goal and objectives. These were discussed and approved by the WWG.

The Wolf/Wildlife Interaction subgroup presented their draft bullet points. These were discussed and approved by the WWG.

The Livestock Depredation subgroup presented their draft bullet points. These were discussed and approved by the WWG, pending agreement on the definition of the term “harassment” and other points that are highlighted in Appendix III. That definition will be discussed at the October 26 meeting. The approved bullet points will not be revisited.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

The WWG began their meeting with a moment of silence in honor of Kevin Conway.

REVIEW/APPROVAL OF 8/31 MEETING RECORD

The group approved the August 31 meeting record, with no changes. Walt asked Kevin Bunnell to see that it was posted to the website.

FUNDING SUBGROUP BULLET POINTS

Debbie Goodman presented the bullet points for the Funding Subgroup. These bullet points were discussed (at considerable length) and modified, but not approved by the WWG. The Funding subgroup will present bullet points for approval at the October 26 meeting.

OBJECTIVES SUBGROUP DRAFT BULLET POINTS

Kevin Bunnell presented the bullet points for the Objectives Subgroup. These bullet points were discussed, modified and approved, point-by-point, by the WWG. The approved bullet points are presented in Appendix I to this meeting record.

WOLF/WILDLIFE INTERACTION SUBGROUP BULLET POINTS

Trey Simmons presented the bullet points for the Wolf/Human Interaction Subgroup. These bullet points were discussed, modified and approved, point-by-point, by the WWG. The approved bullet points are presented in Appendix II to this meeting record.

LIVESTOCK DEPREDATION SUBGROUP BULLET POINTS

Mike Bodenchuk presented the bullet points for the Livestock Depredation Subgroup. These bullet points were discussed, and were discussed and approved by the WWG, pending agreement on the definition of the term “harassment” and other points that are highlighted in Appendix III. That definition will be discussed at the October 26 meeting. The bullet points will not be revisited.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on October 26, 2004 at the UDWR Office in SLC. It will begin at 9:00 AM.

APPENDIX I

Purpose/Goal/Objectives

Purpose:

- Within the authority of the State of Utah, the plan will guide management of wolves in Utah during an interim period until 2015, or we determine wolves have established* in Utah, or assumptions of the plan (political, social, biological, or legal) change. During this interim period, arriving wolves will be studied to determine where they are most likely to settle without conflict.

Management Goal: (7/19/04)

- To manage, study, and conserve wolves moving into Utah while: avoiding conflicts with the wildlife management objectives of the Ute Indian Tribe; preventing livestock depredation; and protecting the investment made in wildlife in Utah.

Management Objectives (9/23/04)

1. Allow wolves that move into Utah to become established*, and be conserved, except when or where:
 - a) wolves conflict with the wildlife management objectives of the Ute Indian Tribe;

**Established is defined as “at least 2 breeding pairs of wild wolves successfully raising at least 2 young each (until December 31st of the year of their birth), for 2 consecutive years.” Cite: USFWS, Reintroduction of Grey Wolves into Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho, Final EIS, May 1994, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena, MT; Pages 6-66 and 6-67 in Appendix 8: Memorandum Regarding Definition of a Wolf Population. From EIS Team Wolf Scientist and Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Coordinator, March 11, 1994.]*

- b) wolves cause unacceptable livestock depredation; or
 - c) wolves contribute to wildlife populations not meeting management objectives as defined by the Utah Wildlife Board’s Predator Management Policy.
2. Fully compensate livestock owners for losses of livestock to wolves.

APPENDIX II

Wolf/Wildlife Interactions

Background

The State of Utah has been successful in managing big game populations; estimated current populations include:

- 280,000 mule deer (State-wide objective current - 320,000; 5 years - 425,000),
 - 58,000 elk (State-wide objective 68,000),
 - 1,000 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and 4,000 moose.
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- Hunters and hunting organizations have been instrumental in this success. For example in the mid-1980s Utah's overall elk harvest was approximately 4,000 animals; today Utah hunters harvest over 10,000 elk annually many of which are trophy class bulls.
 - Considerable investments are being made to improve habitat conditions on public and private lands to maintain and increase big game populations.
 - High percentages of these animals depend on public lands, BLM and National Forest.
 - However, in northern Utah especially, large areas of private land provide big game habitat and are managed for fee hunting under the State's Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit program.
 - For at least the next ten years, it is the opinion of wolf experts in Idaho and Wyoming that any wolves in Utah will be dispersing individuals and it is unlikely that packs will be formed in that time period.
 - Therefore, it is believed that impacts to big game should be negligible.
 - Most publics of diverse backgrounds, opinions, and interests believe that Utah could support some wolves without adversely impacting overall big game populations.
 - However some groups, primarily hunters and livestock operators, fear once wolves arrive in Utah that organized groups, within and outside Utah, will take legal or administrative actions to prevent any control actions that are necessary to manage wolves.
 - In central Idaho and in the Yellowstone area, where wolves were transplanted from Canada, their population growth has exceeded expectations. It is believed that in both locations the populations have reached levels that are in balance with prey and available habitat. In central Idaho and in the Yellowstone area, wolf predation has probably been a factor in localized elk population declines.

Proposed Wolf Management in Utah

- Wolves in Utah will be opportunistic feeders, preying on available big game, primarily elk and mule deer.

- The impact that wolves have on big game will not necessarily be related to the number of wolves in Utah. For example, a few wolves in the Uinta Mountains could adversely impact ongoing attempts to establish a viable population of bighorn sheep.
- The management of wolves in Utah and their relationship to big game will be consistent with HJR 12. It states that “...objectives and strategies of the plan, to the extent possible, (should)...protect the investments made in wildlife management efforts...”
- The WWG believes that investments should include funds, personnel time, volunteer efforts, etc.
- When de-listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wolves in Utah will have the same legal management status and be subjected to the same UDWR predator management policies as black bear and cougar.
- There is overall agreement amongst biologists in Utah and in the northern Rockies that, if necessary, wolf populations can be controlled with available techniques.
- It is not likely that the Utah DWR will ever have the level of information necessary to definitively determine the effects wolves are having on big game. Just as with cougars and bears, professional judgment will be important in considering management options to manage wolves.
- Wolves will be controlled or populations reduced when they cause unacceptable impacts to big game.
- At the DWR Director’s discretion, an emergency management action may be implemented for wolves preying on populations of wildlife that are being re-established, and/or are at low levels, such as bighorn sheep.
- After de-listing, management of wolves will be conducted in accordance with the existing UDWR predator management policy.
- The Utah DWR will have the responsibility to recommend and/or implement actions that are necessary to manage wolves, including conservation and control actions, consistent with HJR-12.
- The WWG recommends that the DWR consider having an employee who can dedicate an appropriate amount of their time to wolf management. Similarly, the Northern and Northeast Regions should consider having at least one wildlife biologist who is available to field verify credible wolf sightings and investigate wildlife and livestock losses suspected to be caused by wolves.
- The WWG recommends that the UDWR and the Legislature consider establishing a compensation/incentive program for CWMU operators to encourage tolerance for wolves on their CWMU units.

APPENDIX III

Livestock Depredation

Compensation Program

- Full compensation for confirmed livestock loss
 - Confirmed 100% Market Value
 - Probable 75% Market Value
 - Possible 50% Market Value
- Compensation should come first from State funds.
- Sub-Group supports a mechanism to pay for missing livestock beyond those in the confirmed, probable and possible categories.
- Investigations (whether confirmed, probable or possible depredation) will be conducted by USDA Wildlife Services (WS) and/or DWR.
- Compensation rules should apply statewide (both north and south of I-70).
- Compensation should be available for confirmed loss of any animal (other than companion animal/pet) that is killed.
- Compensation for confirmed loss to livestock categories other than cattle and sheep (e.g., horses, guard dogs, stock dogs, etc.) should have a cap (per animal).

Depredation Actions

Private Lands

Sighting

Report to agency if concerned

Non-injurious harassment allowed

Injurious harassment (rubber bullets, etc.) with permit from DWR

Professional consultation with agency

Lethal control not an option

Harassment of Livestock*

**Harassment: Any activity including chasing, testing or otherwise disrupting livestock that elicits an observed "Fight or Flight" response.*

Report to agency if concerned

Non-injurious harassment allowed

Injurious harassment (rubber bullets, etc.) with permit from DWR

Professional consultation with agency

Lethal control an option with permit from DWR

“In the Act of ...” (biting or grasping)

Report to agency if concerned

Non-injurious harassment

Injurious harassment (rubber bullets, etc.) without permit

Professional consultation with agency

Lethal control by landowner

Confirmed Loss

Report to agency if concerned

Non-injurious harassment

Injurious harassment (rubber bullets, etc.) without permit

Professional consultation with agency

Landowners may get a permit to shoot a wolf on sight after 1 or 2 confirmed losses.

Status & Notations

Public Land (still to be discussed by the sub-group)

Agency actions (still to be discussed by the sub-group)

NOTE: Items highlighted in yellow have not been resolved, and are to be discussed at the 10/26/04 meeting.