

**MEETING REPORT**  
**UTAH WOLF WORKING GROUP (WWG)**  
**Meeting #6**  
**25 May 2004**  
**DNR Room 1050; Salt Lake City, UT**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Lee Howard (alternate), Sterling Brown (alternate), Randy Simmons, Debbie Goodman, Clark Willis, Trey Simmons, Bill Burbridge, Robert Schmidt, Bill Christensen, Kirk Robinson (alternate – part) , Allison Jones, Don Peay, Byron Bateman (alternate – part)

Missing: Mark Walsh, Karen Corts

Technical Advisors: Mike Bodenchuk, Craig McLaughlin, Laura Romin

Others: Alan Clark, Miles Moretti (part), Bill Fenimore (alternate), Kirk Robinson (alternate), Byron Bateman (alternate), Dr. and Mrs. R.E. Cope, Joan Digiorgio, Larry Dalton

Facilitator: Walt Gasson - Dynamic Solutions Group, LLC

Recorder: Dana Dolsen, UDWR

**DECISIONS AND ACTION ITEMS**

**Walt will get final April meeting record out by June 1, for posting on the web site.**

**Walt will get the draft meeting record from today out for review by June 1.**

**Comments on the draft are due to him by June 15.**

**Steve Nadeau from ID Fish and Game will speak at our June 29 meeting in the afternoon. Bill Burbridge will coordinate with Nadeau and UDWR to get him there.**

**Doug Smith will speak at our July meeting. Allison Jones will coordinate with Smith to get him here. A representative from Parks Canada will also speak at that meeting. Randy Simmons will coordinate with that speaker.**

**Future speakers will be identified and invited by sub-groups made up of WWG members with diverse interests on the issue or issues which the speaker will address.**

**Cell phones will be set on vibrate, and we will take only important calls during WWG meetings. We will try to minimize these interruptions.**

**Mark Walsh has yet to attend a WWG meeting. The absence of county representation is important in the development of this plan. Walt will contact him, and ask him to attend or give us an alternate.**

**Walt will work with Craig to prepare a draft outline for the plan, starting with the second half of the existing outline, and combining it with issues identified in the public scoping meetings and in our discussions. They will send it out to the WWG by June 22. It will be discussed in the afternoon of the June 29 meeting.**

**Joan Digiorgio will assign a graduate student to develop a spreadsheet which compares other states' wolf management plans, listing the issues and comparing the way each plan deals with that issue. Debbie Goodman will coordinate with Joan.**

**Debbie Goodman and Allison Jones will work with the existing sub-group to revise the draft depredation section.**

**A discussion of the goal or goals of this plan will be the first item on the June meeting agenda.**

#### **REVIEW/APPROVAL OF 4/27 MEETING RECORD**

The group approved the suggestions made to the April 27 meeting report. These changes will be made and the revised report posted to the website, including a summary of Jeremy Bruskotter's presentation.

#### **REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS FROM 4/27/04**

The list of action items was reviewed. All were completed, or will be completed by the time we complete the 5/25 meeting.

#### **PRESENTATION: DR. R.E. COPE**

Dr. Bob Cope was invited to address the WWG as a livestock producer, veterinarian and county commissioner from Lemhi County, ID. He has lived in Salmon, ID for the last 20+ years. The opinions expressed are his own. A summary of his presentation (taken from notes by Craig McLaughlin) appears as an appendix to this meeting report.

#### **LETTER TO USFWS – DRAFT #3**

Craig McLaughlin presented a copy of the most recent draft of the letter to the WWG members. This draft was discussed at some length. The points of that discussion included:

- The issue of the I-70 line and wolf-livestock conflict south of that line.
- No need for Colorado Division of Wildlife to be involved in drafting the letter.
- USFWS – Region 2 is currently drafting a letter to clarify and respond to this issue.
- The line will not be easily moved, and the letter did not request that it be moved. This was already decided by the WWG.
- While it is not legally binding, HJR12 told USFWS to include all of Utah in the Western DPS.
- The intent of this letter is to get USFWS to respond to managing wolves south of I-70, and to go on record with a position on this issue.
- Status of wolf hybrids.
- Utah is not a priority area in the Southwest DPS.

- UDWR is concerned about even one wolf south of I-70, and potential impacts on bighorn sheep.

Craig will make changes approved by the group, including reiteration of legislative and UDWR requests to use the state line, not I-70, as the boundary. The issue of “threatened big game” will be addressed. It will be sent by UDWR, and will list all WWG members and affiliations, without any signature from individuals.

### **PROGRESS ON THE PLAN**

Walt introduced this agenda item, noting that he was concerned about the progress the group was making (or not making) on the plan. He noted that to date, the group had not agreed on a final outline for the plan or a list of the issues to be addressed in that plan. He invited group discussion on this topic. Considerable discussion ensued, including the following points:

- Some working group members agreed, noting that the group needed to push forward dealing with issues like depredation on livestock and the effects of wolves on big game.
- The plan should be based on both knowledge and discussion – we still have a year to complete the plan.
- The group needs to identify all the issues. We have not reviewed the plans from other states, or parts of plans that are being developed from states like OR.
- We need homework between meetings, to keep progress moving.
- The framework and assessment developed by Craig serve as a reference.
- This is not a simple process. We should take our time and do it right.
- There are existing plans that we could use as a prototype - perhaps the plans from other states or the plan developed by the USU students. Using pieces of plans from other states could be a method of approach.
- The assessment is in draft form and will be valuable. Two issues have surfaced – depredation on livestock, and the effects on big game.
- The second half of the outline exists on one page. This could be expanded by a subgroup.
- The legislature needs to feel that the WWG is on track. The livestock depredation section can reflect bear and cougar depredation processes.
- DWR will report to the legislature in November. Without some demonstrated progress by the WWG, the legislature may take action on its own.
- Products to report in November should include some cohesiveness in completing the plan, addressing the issues from HJR12, the structure of the final plan, and sections dealing with livestock depredation/conflict and effects on big game populations
- We should develop an outline with major issues and deadlines for completion of major sections, then target the top issues and tackle those
- Is wolf conservation something the legislature is concerned about? That may depend on the nature of the plan. The wolf is a protected species – conservation is inherent.
- We need to review the current working outline, set times for top priority issues to be completed, and have materials from other states’ plans.

- We need to know what UDWR can support, given the amount of private land in northern Utah, the opposition of the CWMU operators and the Ute Tribe, the impacts on sheep operators in the Manti area, etc.
- The plan needs to reflect public input.
- We will not be stopping wolves at the border. They will disperse into UT, they may form packs.
- How will the WWG work to address an increasing number of wolves in UT?
- A spreadsheet comparison between state plans could help.
- Wolf management and conservation goals need to be addressed first.
- Walt offered to start with the second half of the existing outline, and combine it with issues identified in the public scoping meetings and in our discussions, to serve as a first draft outline for the plan.
- Joan Digiorgio offered assistance from a graduate student to develop a spreadsheet which compares other states' wolf management plans, listing the issues and comparing the way each plan deals with that issue.
- At our next meeting, we will spend the morning working on the outline for the strategic plan.

### **INTERIM REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE**

In an effort to demonstrate progress on the development of the plan, the WWG will present an interim report to the legislature. The draft report was prepared by Bill Burbridge and the late Jerry Mason. Bill presented the latest draft of the report to the WWG for their final suggestions and comments. A number of changes were suggested and approved by the WWG. Bill recorded changes to the draft report, and passed it on to UDWR staff. They will transmit it to the Interim Legislative Committee.

### **WOLF-LIVESTOCK DEPREDATION DRAFT**

Jim Bowns, Sterling Brown and Clark Willis drafted a section on livestock depredation. Sterling presented this section to the group for their review and discussion. Considerable discussion followed, including the following points;

- The group must settle first on goals and objectives for the plan. We cannot discuss this piece without discussion of a conservation goal.
- Can UT financially support wolves? Cost of lost livestock and staff costs for control must be considered.
- HJR12 does not anticipate “no wolves”.
- Source of funding for compensating depredation?
- Without funds already available, it's difficult to proceed with compensating operators.
- Defenders of Wildlife has funded livestock depredation in UT already. It would be unwise to ignore this funding for livestock losses.
- Continued funding from Defenders is dependent on the plan the WWG develops.
- Wolf depredation funding through income tax check-off, beginning in 2005.
- DWR to apply for DNR grant for funding depredation.
- Providing funds for livestock weight loss due to wolves.
- DWR policy and the 4(d) Rule: Disagreement between WWG members on the restrictiveness of the OR draft plan and/or the 4(d) rule.

- Disagreement on the issue of conflict: Is it better to manage based on conflict or minimize conflict through management?

The WWG concluded that the effectiveness of this draft was limited by the narrowness of the interests represented by the sub-group and the absence of agreed-upon goals for the plan. Debbie Goodman and Allison Jones will work with the existing sub-group to revise the draft depredation section.

### **WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN GOALS**

The WWG found that the absence of agreed-upon goals for the management plan was jeopardizing their discussions on a number of different topics. Walt and Craig presented a matrix developed by Kevin Conway, to help the WWG weigh issues in the development of their goals. Some comments were noted on this matrix:

- Reimbursements to livestock owners, not private landowners.
- Allow livestock owners to control problem wolves – perhaps could be landowners.

Discussion on potential goals then ensued. The following points were captured:

- Ranchers want no negative impact to their operations
- Sportsmen investment in 50+ years of big game conservation is at stake. Issues for sportsmen include: demands of an increasing human population, hunting demand exceeds opportunity, desire for no loss to hunting opportunity, no increase in hunting license costs, compensation for ranchers and outfitters from wolves in UT. How can these projected impacts be handled to sustain hunting and ranching opportunities? If not SFW's concerns are not satisfied, then in their opinion there's no room for wolves in Utah.
- Utah Wolf forum represents multiple interests, including some hunters and some ranchers/livestock growers, as well as other citizens represented in the public opinion polls.
- It is possible that 3 packs (~30 wolves) could take X number of livestock and Y number of big game. Is this an acceptable outcome, even with lethal control and compensation for livestock depredation?
- Are the true consequences of what wolves may bring about understood by most Utahans represented in the surveys?
- Are surveys such as the USU survey legitimate and valid, or biased?
- Some conjecture that we may have a few wolves in Utah, but the costs will be high.
- Goal for the management plan: Can wolves be allowed in Utah?
- Public scoping "response" is not really totally representative on the matrix.
- Wolves will come to Utah. How does the state manage them?
- Does Utah care about wolves or not? If not, then do nothing. If we do, then do something.
- What is the bottom line, financially? It's based on the number of acceptable wolves.
- Matrix is worthless at the bottom line.
- Given these parameters, can wolves even survive in Utah?

- Some conjecture that Utah cannot effectively support sustainable wolf populations, due to inadequate habitat in comparison to ID, MT, or WY. Appropriate economic solutions can be proposed and provided.
- Habitat availability is not a limiting factor. Conflict and funding to cover costs are.
- OR has three tiers of wolf population sizes, with impacts and management actions predicted for each – small, intermediate and large. They take an adaptive approach.
- Will this wolf management plan allow any wolves? Some wolves can be sustained over time.

The group then considered the proposal of allowing any wolves in Utah. This proposal failed the “consensus minus two” rule, with three votes in opposition.

A second proposal was offered: “Allow and manage one or more wolves in Utah at levels that are:

1. Consistent with available habitat;
2. Within acceptable losses to agriculture;
3. Within acceptable losses to sportsmen;
4. Within a reasonable cost to taxpayers;
5. Biologically sustainable, and
6. Legally defensible.”

This proposal will be discussed by the WWG, using the listserv, during the period between now and the June meeting. The goal for the plan will be the first item considered at that meeting.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on June 29 at 9:00 AM in Room 1050 of the DWR Building, in Salt Lake City. The July meeting is scheduled for July 27. This conflicts with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies annual meeting, and the UDWR staff will be unavailable. Allison will poll the WWG members about a change to July 20. However, we have already invited Doug Smith for July 27, and he may not be available on an alternate date.

## APPENDIX

### **Presentation to Utah Wolf Working Group Dr. Cope – Veterinarian with strong ties to cattle industry, residing in Salmon, Idaho May 25, 2004**

Opening Discussion – background information:

Baker Ranch on the East Fork – location where lots of non-lethal methods of wolf control tried.

Dr. Cope's involvement with wolves began in 1995:

The Eugene Hussey Ranch experienced wolf killings only 6 days after the initial release of wolves into central Idaho – one wolf was shot on top of calf

Dr. Cope's appraisal of the situation in Central Idaho:

- Local public does not trust US Government (USFWS)
- Some federal personnel are honest, others have an agenda.
- Much distrust in public around Salmon, ID area.
- Public opinion polls show 60% in favor of wolves, but most people in favor of wolves live outside the release area (are not living with wolves)
- Local people rallied around Dr. Cope when USFWS Law Enforcement approached him in office about tampering with evidence.
- Since introduction of wolves in 1995, central Idaho has experienced a slow increase in the number of livestock lost annually except for 2003
- Wolves are not as common in low elevations any more (less wolves – appears they have learned to stay out)
- However, there were less livestock loss in 2003 than in previous years.
- Since wolf reintroduction:
  - Cattle are wilder (Are they getting used to living with wolves?)
  - Difficult to prove if weaning weights have dropped – but believes they have. He also explains he has no data of his own to share on this, and also notes John Oakleaf's study which found no correlation with weight loss and depredation, though there may have been confounding factors in that study, although Oakleaf did not study weaning weights.
  - Decreased conception rates – but can not quantify

Discussion: Cattle don't change range habits (they tend to congregate in same areas year after year). Therefore, certain areas (operators that run cattle in specific locations) have high losses to wolves, but most do not.

Best approach to dealing with wolf management issues is the common sense approach – wolf reproduction is higher than was projected before reintroduction.

The number of confirmed kills is much lower than actual kills. (Oakleaf study showed about 1 confirmed kill for every 5.7 actual kills) but the use of a multiplier factor is fraught with problems – the distance from home ranch, amount of visitation, husbandry practices are important variables that influence detection rates.

In central Idaho, there were steady numbers of cattle turned out on federal lands over a long time period. Comparisons show that the loss was about 1% prior to wolf reintroduction. Now (post-wolf) operators are averaging about 4-5% loss each year.

Dr. Cope reviewed a federally funded livestock depredation compensation program based upon a Federal-County Memorandum of Understanding. This program began in 2002, and is funded on an annual basis by a congressional appropriation. The program's purpose is to reimburse livestock owners for missing animals that are not confirmed losses. A committee of 6 representatives, including a representative from each of the 6 counties in Idaho where most of the wolves reside, evaluates claims and determines compensation. The program is statewide in scope, and the committee membership ensures local representation and direction.

The program resulted from a Congressional appropriation of \$100K in 2002 to the State of Idaho. This translated to \$90K in hand for payments. During the first year, when claims from 2001 and 2002 were considered, the committee approved \$116K in claims, so payments were pro-rated, and livestock owners received 86% of the value of lost livestock. Livestock values were set using a low monetary value per calf.

In 2003, Congress appropriated \$50K, and livestock owners submitted only \$30K in claims, so the committee will pay 100% of the value of lost stock.

To determine how many of missing livestock to pay for, the committee uses an arithmetic method: they subtract historic effects from post-wolf claim rates to determine how many animals to pay for. This is possible because stocking rates have remained constant for many years. The method allows the committee to make allowance for losses to other predators and factors, rather than attributing all missing calves to wolf predation.

The committee evaluates ranchers individually, on basis of their individual historic losses.

Dr. Cope believes carcass management is necessary to minimize attraction of wolves to livestock operations.

He also believes that wolf depredation rates on cattle are positively related to the proximity of cattle to elk calving grounds.

Dr. Cope's view of the Defenders of Wildlife Compensation Program:

- Group has changed from being considered radicals to acceptance by locals as a group that means well, and are learning how ranchers do things.

- Lots of ranchers do not want to submit claims – do not want a handout.



Dr. Cope's views on living with wolves in Idaho:

East Fork area – Baker ranch has sustained lots of hits by wolves

-Non-lethal methods have been tried at the Baker ranch, and some of them work, but only for a short time (about 1 week, in Dr. Cope's opinion)

-Wolves exhibit learned behavior, and become habituated to non-lethal deterrents.  
- The difficulty with dogs is that they are not good for guarding cattle – better for sheep.

Stockmen do not hate wolves – their hatred is directed at federal government

The ecosystem in Idaho has been changed by man

Cope believes the wolves that were introduced are bigger than those that occurred in Idaho historically. In his opinion the introduced Canadian subspecies of wolf can decimate elk.

Does not believe that a mule deer system can support these large wolves.

Questions and Answers:

- 1) How many packs in Idaho have access to livestock?
  - a. In his opinion all of them. In his opinion the meal of choice is elk calf, then beef calf, then mule deer.

State wildlife agency's descriptions of Elk population status, with cow:calf ratios are fine, but there is a scale problem. Wolves exhibit localized effects, not regional effects. Where there are no wolves, have too many elk. Where there are wolves, very few elk in his opinion. Cope notes that most of his data come from ranchers and outfitters.

- 2) How is wolf predation ranked in importance (as a factor contributing to losses) by cattlemen?
  - a. Varies, some hit harder than others. Where wolves are around and present, considered important factor to contend with. Operate on a very small profit margin (high fuel prices, interest rates, fertility problems), and wolves are blamed for taking profit away. If profit margin is 1-2%, then the 1-2% loss to wolves is what prevents rancher from being profitable.
- 3) Can you comment on the recent poisoning incidents?
  - a. Poisoning using bits of meat is being done along trails, where there are domestic dogs, but very little exposure to wolves. Dr. Cope is not in agreement with poisoning, nor is the local public in agreement with poisoning.

- 4) Distancing of livestock industry from Ron Gillette? Industry is not distancing itself. Why not? Dr. Cope believes elk, cattle reduction figures from Gillette are on track.
- 5) How hard are wolves to manage, once you decide to using lethal methods?
  - a. Depends on amount of money to invest in management.
  - b. Depends on whether government, or public will be involved in management.
- 6) Given that livestock predation is unacceptable, is it possible for Wildlife Services to control the situation?
  - a. It is possible, but Dr. Cope doesn't know how effective either government or public hunting will be.

Discussion: Dr. Cope strives to maintain lifestyle of rural Idaho that is based upon the livestock community. Native Americans were transient, following the salmon runs. In his opinion there were not strong big game herds or old-growth forests pre-European settlement – both vegetative and wildlife communities changed composition following settlement.

- 7) What advice do you have for the WWG, in developing a wolf management plan for Utah?
  - a) Will have to abide by laws of nature – wolves will come, and they will reproduce.
    - Public comment is essential, need to establish a dialogue with local people.
    - Recommends involving county governments
- 8) If you had the power to manage wolves, how would you?
  - a) Allow ranchers to take care of problems when they develop – shoot wolves if need to.
    - Don't pay government employees to kill wolves.
- 9) Should hunters be compensated for lost game to wolves?
  - a) Maybe, but how can you compensate someone for losses of something that hunters do not solely own, due to another animal that the government doesn't solely own? Both game and wolves owned by all citizens.