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## State approves lethal action against Imnaha pack

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of ODFW The Imnaha wolf pack's alpha male after being refitted with a working GPS collar on May 19, 2011. It's one of wolves from the pack targeted to be killed by wildlife officials because of livestock depredation.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on Thursday shot and killed four wolves from the Imnaha pack in Wallowa County following five confirmed depredations on private land in the Upper Swamp Creek area in March.

Chat

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ODFW wolf coordinator Russ Morgan said the four wolves targeted for killing included an aging alpha male, OR-4, and an alpha female, OR-39, that has limped with a back leg injury for the past couple years. The male was nearly 10 years old, which Morgan said is “very old for a wolf in the wild.”

Morgan said it’s possible the male’s age and the female’s disability caused the wolves to turn on livestock instead of deer and elk. Two younger wolves, possibly yearlings, were believed to be traveling with them. The four appear to have split off from the rest of the Imnaha Pack, which numbered at least eight at the end of 2015.

Morgan said ODFW is following guidelines of the state’s wolf management plan, which is up for review this year.

He called the decision unfortunate, but said it is a necessary response to the pack’s chronic livestock attacks.

“The (wolf) plan is about conservation, but it’s also about management,” Morgan said.

ODFW on Wednesday night issued a report confirming the fifth recent depredation on private land in the Upper Swamp Creek area north of Enterprise. The most recent case involves an adult ram sheep that was discovered live but with multiple fresh bite wounds “inside both hind legs, on the back, left flank area and over the right rib cage.”

The incident was reported and investigated Wednesday and comes on the heels of two other confirmed depredations in the same area involving heifer calves that were announced Monday. Wildlife officials determined that one calf was killed sometime Saturday night or Sunday morning, while the other likely was killed Monday morning and was still warm when an investigator arrived on scene.

Both heifer calves weighed approximately 700 lbs., according to ODFW incident reports, and each had signs of numerous bite wounds and scrapes. A third, live calf was found in the same pasture with “numerous bite wounds and severe tissue damage on both hind legs.”

Incident reports indicate fresh wolf tracks were discovered ~~on~~<sup>near</sup> the carcasses and GPS radio-collar data confirm two members of the Imnaha Pack — OR-4 and OR-39 — were in the area at the time.

ODFW investigators previously confirmed a separate wolf depredation involving a calf in the same pasture on March 9. Another depredation involving an adult male sheep was confirmed about 3 miles away on March 25.

All five March depredations have been attributed to the Imnaha Pack. On March 17 ODFW officials released an updated map of the Area of Known Wolf Activity for the Imnaha Pack, which roams primarily in Wallowa County. The newest AKWA map, last revised in December, now extends across much of the Zumwalt Prairie area north of Enterprise.

ODFW has not killed any wolves since May 2011, when two Imnaha Pack members were dispatched for livestock attacks. The agency sought to kill two more pack members in September 2011, but conservation groups won a stay of the order from the Oregon Court of Appeals.

Oregon Wild, a Portland based conservation group with long involvement in wolf issues, opposes lethal control.

“ODFW should not be killing members of the Imnaha Pack, or any wolves for that matter, while the wolf plan remains under review and out of date,” Executive Director Sean Stevens said in a prepared statement.

“Given ambiguity in the current wolf plan, increased poaching, premature (state endangered species) delisting, and renewed calls from special interest groups for aggressive killing, the public has every reason to be concerned for Oregon’s recovering wolf population.”

Oregon Wild questioned whether the livestock producers involved have taken sufficient defensive measures against wolves.

Morgan said the sheep producer had three protection dogs with the sheep, checked the livestock three times a day, employed a range rider to haze the wolves and used midnight spotlighting.

The cattle producer delayed pasture rotation to keep cattle closer to a public road, pastured yearlings with cows, frequently checked calving cattle and used range rider patrols as well, Morgan said in a news release.

The onset of lambing and calving season made more attacks a possibility, he said.

“Even more cattle and sheep will be on these private lands soon as calving and lambing season continues, increasing the risk for even more losses from this group of depredating wolves,” he said.

The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association supports the kill order, acknowledging it is a “difficult” decision.

“It’s an unfair situation for the livestock owners and the wolves themselves,” said OCA wolf committee chair Todd Nash, a Wallowa County rancher.

“Wolves are doing what they naturally do, but have been put in a situation in Oregon where they are going to be in constant conflict with livestock and hunter’s game,” Nash said in a prepared statement.

Eliminating specific, problem animals so that multiple species can live together is sometimes necessary, Nash said.

ODFW has filed official incident reports on 10 wolf depredation investigations so far in 2016. Six have been confirmed depredations, one was categorized as “possible/unknown” and three were determined not to be related to wolves. The only confirmed wolf depredation this year that didn’t occur in Wallowa County involved a heifer in Klamath County in late February.

The ODFW Commission this spring began review of the state's wolf management plan, an effort that may take nine months. To view the most recent AKWA map for the Imnaha Pack as well as previous maps, visit <http://tinyurl.com/j8xxjdz>.

*Editor's note: Eric Mortenson of The Capital Press contributed extensively to this report.*