

**HOW MANY WOLVES ARE ENOUGH?
EXAMINING THE NEED TO DELIST
THE GRAY WOLF**

OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE AND
FISHERIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING ON HOW MANY WOLVES ARE ENOUGH? EXAMINING THE NEED TO DELIST THE GRAY WOLF

Friday, May 3, 2024

**U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
Sandstone, Minnesota**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., Central Time, North Pine Government Center, 1602 Highway 23 North, Sandstone, Minnesota, Hon. Cliff Bentz [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Bentz and Hageman.

Also present: Representatives Fischbach, Tiffany, Stauber, and Maloy.

Mr. BENTZ. The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

Good morning, everyone. I want to welcome our witnesses, Members, and our guests in the audience to today's hearing. The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on a hearing entitled, "How Many Wolves Are Enough? Examining the Need to Delist the Gray Wolf."

By way of introduction, I am Cliff Bentz, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries. I also represent the 2nd District of Oregon, a district far bigger than all states east of the Mississippi. But I digress.

I am grateful to be joined today by five of my colleagues. I ask unanimous consent that the gentlewoman from Minnesota and the gentleman from Minnesota, Mrs. Fischbach and Mr. Stauber; the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Tiffany; as well as the gentlewoman from Utah, Ms. Maloy, be allowed to participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

Since this is a congressional hearing, we are going to begin with the Pledge of Allegiance. I now recognize a group of students from the Harvest Christian School in Sandstone, Minnesota, to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Please rise.

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. And to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you so much.

Before I give my opening statement, I want to explain how we ended up here today. Some months ago, some wolves in Oregon attacked a group of about 300 heifers, younger mother cows, in the southern part of my state, ran them through fences that enclosed

them and ran them dozens if not hundreds of miles in through the forest and scattered them widely.

This was just one event among many that are occurring in Oregon. So, it seemed to me, and I spoke with the Committee staff about this, and everybody agreed, we needed to have a hearing on the wolf. We then debated where to have the hearing. Fortunately, in Oregon, we don't have as many wolves as you guys do here. You guys have thousands of wolves; we have hundreds. So, it seemed to me that the proper place to hold the hearing was a place just like this, where people and wolves are forced to cohabitate, and their numbers are in the thousands, because, of course, the value of this hearing is going to be on its messaging ability. That is why I am happy that people are watching back in Oregon online as I speak, and I am happy that we will have this opportunity to raise the challenge that the wolf presents nationwide in today's hearing.

We are joined today, and I want to have each one of the Members up here not give a lengthy speech. We don't have time for that, but to at least explain where they are from and who they are. We will start here with Congresswoman Fischbach.

Mrs. FISCHBACH. I am Michelle Fischbach, and I represent the western half of Minnesota, so I border Canada, North Dakota, and South Dakota. And I am happy to be here today because obviously we share this issue in the western part of the state also. Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Harriet Hageman, and I represent the state of Wyoming. My involvement with the wolves was representing a variety of organizations over a 15-year period in Wyoming from 2002 until 2017 when we were finally successful at delisting the gray wolf in Wyoming through a variety of lawsuits. So, I have been fighting this battle for well over two decades.

Mr. STAUBER. I am Congressman Stauber, representing this great 8th District of Minnesota, and I am so happy to be here. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. TIFFANY. Congressman Tom Tiffany. I am straight east of here in Wisconsin. I cover the northern part of Wisconsin in the 7th Congressional District. Great issue for us to be hearing. And I see a few Wisconsinites here. Good to see you, and people from throughout the upper Midwest joining us for this, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. MALOY. Celeste Maloy. I represent the 2nd District in Utah. I am also the newest Member of Congress, but my background is in agriculture. I have my FFA bracelet on, and I have spent my career working in natural resources policy, natural resources management, so I am really excited to be here.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. CLIFF BENTZ, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON

Notwithstanding Teddy Roosevelt's statement that, "The wolf is a beast of waste and destruction," the wolf is here to stay. So, this hearing is not about eradicating the gray wolf, but the wolf is not going to be reintroduced in every place where it used to be such as Manhattan Island, Southern California, Denver, Seattle, Baltimore, for example. Why? Because those areas are now filled

with people, and there is no longer habitat or prey for the wolf. And, of course, no one wants to put their children at risk, as is the case, as we heard this morning, in Minnesota.

So, the burden of returning the nature to “balance” will not fall on those living in the hills of L.A. Or in the concrete canyons of New York. Instead, the cost and the risks of harboring an apex predator will fall upon those of us who live in rural America. But this does not mean that we who live in rural areas must silently accept the urban imposition of this very real cost of the wolf, no. We do not have to accept this any more than the law requires.

What I am saying is we do not have to accept any more wolves than the absolute minimum necessary to meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, and we need to be able to control the population of wolves so that minimum number is not exceeded. To do this, we must know how many wolves the ESA requires, and in my mind, the answer is enough to maintain its survival as a species and no more.

Secondly, we must have the wolf removed from the ESA’s list of endangered creatures. Why? Because if they are on the list, their numbers cannot be controlled. I am extremely happy to mention that just 2 days ago the bill to remove the wolf from the endangered species list passed across the Floor of the House and is on its way to the Senate. Yes.

Given that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found that the wolf is no longer endangered, the only surprise in the process of passing the bill was the number of Democrats voting against it: 201 Democrats, all but 4 brave souls, voted to keep the wolf listed. Just 4 out of 205 Democrats voted to delist. This is amazing, because unless the wolf is delisted, rural Americans cannot legally act to protect our communities, wildlife, children, and livestock from the horror of being attacked and torn apart by a wolf. Why anyone would vote for a continued needless destruction of vast numbers of deer, elk, and moose, not to mention the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers and ranchers is beyond me.

As we will hear from witnesses today, unmanaged wolf populations have a devastating impact on farmers and ranchers and other wildlife species, and the communities that depend upon them. The fact is that wolves are apex predators who rely on killing other animals to survive, whether they are a farmer’s cattle or wild moose living out in the forests of Minnesota.

The management of wolf populations is the only logical path forward that can strike a balance between maintaining a healthy population and protecting the way of life of so many of our constituents. The good news is that states have already proven to be capable wildlife managers. States, not the Federal Government. This was confirmed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2 months ago when they denied petitions to list gray wolves in the Western United States and relist them in the Northern Rockies ecosystem, an area where wolves have been delisted for over 10 years.

The Service stated that wolves “are not at risk of extinction in the Western United States now or in the foreseeable future.” The Service also stated that wolves in the Western United States have a healthy abundance, retain genetic diversity and the ability to respond to high mortality events, and maintain adaptive capacity.

Instead of sitting on our lands and allowing the issues associated with an unmanaged wolf population to grow, we, as Members of Congress, must continue to act to ensure the voices of our constituents are heard and that we do everything we can to delist the gray wolf. The action on the House Floor this week was one step in the right direction, and I believe this hearing today will continue that path forward.

I will now recognize Mr. Stauber for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. PETE STAUBER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for coming to Minnesota's 8th Congressional District and convening this field hearing.

As we will learn this morning, the growing wolf population and the inability to properly manage its species, due largely to its listing status under the Endangered Species Act, is affecting our way of life here in Minnesota. It is an incredibly important issue facing my constituents, and I really appreciate the attention you and the entire Subcommittee are giving to it.

I also want to thank all my colleagues for traveling here to Minnesota and joining us today. You all come from very different districts around the country and thus provide important perspectives on the wolf management.

Over the past several months, I have traveled across my district to hold listening sessions and attend grassroots assemblies focused on the impact of Minnesota's growing wolf population, like those organized by the Hunters for Hunters organization that has been at the forefront of this issue and really making a big difference.

What I have heard from my constituents is clear: The gray wolf has been recovered, but that is not just something we are hearing anecdotally. We have the data and the science to back it up. When the gray wolf was listed as threatened in Minnesota under the Endangered Species Act in 1978, a recovery goal of 1,250 to 1,400 wolves was set.

Today, according to data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, we have over 2,700 wolves in Minnesota. That is about half of the total wolves in the entire Lower 48. By official estimates, half of the wolves in this country are here in Minnesota, and their population is twice as high as our wildlife managers' goal set at the species listing.

That said, as I have traveled across the district, it is clear that this 2,700 wolf count number is an undercount. There are likely hundreds if not thousands more. We should celebrate that. The gray wolf is a success story of the ESA. Species were never meant to be listed under the ESA indefinitely, but that is the reality today. Since the ESA's enactment over five decades ago, only 2 to 3 percent of species ever listed have made it off the list.

The ESA has been weaponized by radical activist groups that don't want to follow the science, the science that proves the gray wolf has recovered and should be delisted. And that is not just an opinion myself and my colleagues on this panel hold; it is something that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed with under multiple administrations. The Obama, Trump, and Biden

administrations have all agreed and have all taken steps to delist the gray wolf, but each of these efforts have been blocked by activist judges in cases brought by activist groups.

Earlier this week, as mentioned earlier, the House of Representatives passed the Trust the Science Act, a bill that I was proud to help lead, that directs the Fish and Wildlife Service to reinstate the 2020 delisting rule. This passed with bipartisan support. It now heads to the Senate where it will be up to our U.S. Senators to act, and I call on both Senators Klobuchar and Smith to follow the science and push for a vote on this legislation on the Senate Floor.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses this morning who will share just how important this legislation and proper wolf management is to communities across Minnesota and the entire United States.

Before I yield, I do want to acknowledge two witnesses that were invited to testify but declined the Subcommittee's invitation. Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Sarah Strommen was invited to testify, but she refused to do so. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was also invited to testify; they, too, declined our invitation. I think their absence, unfortunately, speaks volumes.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for coming to the great state of Minnesota and convening this hearing, and I look forward to our conversations. I yield back.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Stauber.

One thing before I introduce our witnesses, I would like everyone to recognize the Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee, of which I chair, staff for all of their hard work putting this together. Can you give them a round of applause, please?

Thank you. I will now introduce our witnesses: Senator Steve Green of Minnesota's Senate from Fosston, Minnesota; Representative Nathan Nelson of the Minnesota House of Representatives from Hinckley, Minnesota. And I want to thank you for the tour you gave us of your farm this morning, it was superb, and thank you so much for taking that time and effort; Dr. Nathan Roberts, associate professor for conservation and wildlife management from the College of Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri; Mr. John Williams, co-chair of the Wolf Committee with the Oregon Cattlemen's Association in Enterprise, Oregon; Mr. Jim Hammill, president of Iron Range Consulting and Services in Crystal Falls, Michigan.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record. We use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green; when you have 1 minute remaining, the light will turn yellow; and, at the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement. I will also allow all witnesses to testify before Member questioning.

I now recognize Senator Green. Senator, you are recognized for 5 minutes, and we understand you have to leave almost immediately to go back and vote.

So, don't be surprised, everyone, if he gives a statement and then runs out the door.

Mr. GREEN. Yes, I am not abandoning you.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. STEVE GREEN, STATE SENATOR,
MINNESOTA STATE SENATE, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA**

Mr. GREEN. Chairman Bentz and Committee members, I want to thank you so much for coming here. This is a big issue for us. Most of my statement was already testified by our good Congressman, so that will make mine a little shorter. But I will say that I have been working on this issue since I was elected in 2013. It is not a new issue for us. And the devastation of the wolves in my district and to the east and north, this goes back as far as I can remember into the 1970s, where our livestock producers were losing their calves and, even at that time, too, having problems with the government agencies trying to get them under control.

And, in 2013, the same number that you are looking at now, this 2,700, is what the agency was claiming. We didn't believe it then. We were having higher numbers given to us then, and now when we see how much the population has grown again, and I want to thank these people behind me for being here, because they are a big part of how this came into the open. The Hunters for Hunters and the people that have their video cameras up, their game cameras up, have shown us that the wolves are everywhere, and the deer are disappearing, and it is noticeable now. So, I really appreciate the fact that this is coming to light.

First of all, the wolves, they will go after the easiest prey, and right now our deer population is down, and now they are coming more and more after the cattle. And, as their food source declines, now we are seeing them coming after our domestic animals. And what is next? We fear for our children out here. And the wolves are no longer afraid of us. You can drive right by them on the road and they will stand right there, so there is no fear of humans.

The other issue that I want to talk about before my time runs out is the issue with the Indigenous people and the wolf being sacred. I don't deny that there are some people that do hold that, but the vast majority of us do not. I am a member of White Earth Nation. We rely a great deal on deer and other game animals for our food source.

And, if you talk to certain people that like to talk on the news, they will tell you a different story. But, if you get down and you talk to the people that don't want to be on the news that, I don't want to say fear the camera but have no desire to be in front of a camera or have their face out there, they will tell you a completely different story, that this is very important to them. And the deer population for us and also the smaller game population is very, very important. So, you won't hear the same things if you are out talking to regular people that you do talking to those that are constantly in the news, and I hope you take that into account.

Most of the rest of my testimony has already been said here, so I am not going to continue down that path. I do want to thank you, because part of my testimony was to ask you to move your bills forward apart from the Fish and Wildlife and to get these bills through Congress, that we can deal with the issues we have in Minnesota. And we still will have a fight in Minnesota, but you will

ease a lot of our concerns by getting these bills through. I appreciate that very much, and thank you for hearing me out.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Green follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. STEVE GREEN, STATE SENATOR, MINNESOTA
STATE SENATE

Chairman Bentz, and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing. The overpopulation of wolves in Minnesota is having devastating effects.

US Fish and Wildlife has determined the adequate numbers for a healthy wolf population to be 1,251 to 1,400. Currently the DNR count is estimated to be 2,700. Roughly double. People living in Northern Minnesota believe this count to be significantly higher.

Livestock producers have been dealing with these predators for years. As they have continued to increase in numbers the devastation has spread. The deer population is diminished. And as these and other prey decrease, domestic pets are now the targeted food source for these predators.

The circumstances that existed when wolves were listed as endangered are no longer relevant. The claims that managing wolves will decimate their numbers are not supported by the facts. We need only look to states that have management plans to validate this.

The other argument that Indigenous people are all against wolf management is false. I am a member of the White Earth Nation. I have lived on the reservation most of my life. There are some that oppose delisting. But those that rely on deer and other game as a source food do not. They are my family, friends, and neighbors. Their voices are seldom heard. However, if you take the time get to know them, they will tell you they are concerned when deer populations are low.

If the Fish and Wildlife agency will not act, we are hoping the Legislature will act. There is more at stake than the ones already stated. We have all heard reports of wolves in yards killing pets. How long before it is a child? Reaction to that will be too late. We already see wolves no longer fear man. We have an opportunity to be proactive. Every day we wait increases the danger. School will soon be out; kids and adults will be out more. We must act.

I am asking the committee to bring these concerns to DC. This should not be a complicated issue. Delisting the wolf will bring many benefits, and few if any negative ones.

Thank you for allowing me to voice these concerns.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you.

I now recognize Representative Nelson for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. NATHAN NELSON, STATE
REPRESENTATIVE, MINNESOTA STATE HOUSE OF REP-
RESENTATIVES, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA**

Mr. NELSON. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you for this opportunity to testify. And, for those that were able to come out to the farm this morning and tour it and just see firsthand where our farm has experienced livestock depredation, thank you for that, and being able to share my story. And my story is much the same as many of the farms in our area. There are times that we can find the results of the loss, and we are able to turn in a claim, and it is a hard thing to deal with, but we are thankful that there are claims available and that is there. And one of the things that is important is to continue to be able to have these funds available for when we do have the loss.

Our farm, it was in early 1990s, wolves were reintroduced in our area, and it was shortly thereafter we started seeing the behavior of our livestock change. And it wasn't much longer after that that we started experiencing loss. And, unfortunately, one of the things

with loss, if you can't find any remains of an animal of our livestock, we are not able file a claim to do anything with that.

So, it wasn't really until the early 2000s that we actually had a claim that was payable and to really be able to investigate. And, since then, we have lost somewhere around 40 animals, calves and cows both, on our farm. Many of them that we have lost we can't account for them, but I am quite confident that they have been lost to wolf depredation.

And my neighbors are much the same stories. And while much of my testimony is going to be about livestock, one of the things in our area, as you have driven in here, there is a lot of forested area. It is a great area for recreation. And I think one of the things that has really brought this story to the highlight has been the sportsmen that have really gotten on board. They have been sharing their pictures from their game camera. They have been sharing their stories of the declining deer population. And, yes, there may be several factors to that, but I believe that wolves are a big part of that story.

When the wolves have been listed, they have gone back and forth on being delisted by several different methods, but most of it is agency action. And, on the endangered species list, unfortunately, it feels like it is the Hotel California; you can check out anytime you want, but you can never leave.

The story of the wolves is something that should be celebrated. The recovery has happened, I believe there is a sustainable population, and now we are to a point where I truly believe that we need to have management of a species. When there are natural resources, all of it must be managed properly, whether it is our forestry, iron, whatever wildlife, all of it. And the timber wolves are one of those, the gray wolf.

And, as the management changes, unfortunately, we are not going to be able to increase the number to be able to just be able to go out in the wilderness and see them. I rarely see a wolf on my farm, maybe five, six times a year, and I am outside a lot, and I live in the heart of gray wolf territory. And it is rare to see them. But, at the same time, we are not going to be able to just, like a zoo, be able to go out and see these animals, but yet they are a part of our ecosystem, and they do need to be managed.

I thank you for being here today and being able to hear this story. I have countless stories of constituents of mine, as a state representative, that have reached out to me and shared their stories, their heartbreaking loss, wolves coming in right up around their house, taking their pets. It is an issue that is continuing to grow, and I think, without further action, they are going to become more and more brazen, and there will be more and more conflict.

And I truly believe that we do need to have management and that we should celebrate the success of the endangered species plan and the Act or what has taken place and be able to remove them and move to management. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nelson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. NATHAN NELSON, STATE REPRESENTATIVE,
DISTRICT 11B, MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wolves in Minnesota:

Wolves have been a part of Minnesota's ecosystem since its founding as a state, and their existence extends long before the state's creation. Throughout Minnesota's history, the wolf population has varied, and has been relatively stable over the last three decades.

In recent history, the territory of Minnesota wolves has been concentrated in the northern third of the state, with expansion south and west becoming increasingly common. For the farming and ranching communities, this expansion has created an increased number of interactions with humans and livestock, necessitating a greater need for management of the wolf for both safety and economic reasons.

According to the most recent Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wolf Population Update conducted in 2023, the state estimated that the 2022–2023 mid-winter wolf population was 2,919 wolves. This number is significantly higher than the minimum number of wolves needed for the population to be determined healthy, which is 1,600 wolves within the state.

Although historically believed to be sensitive to higher human population density, recent data from 1988–2018 indicates that the modern wolf population has developed an increased tolerance to humans and roadways.

This increased tolerance has also led to more negative interactions, making it harder to mitigate the risk to livestock and pets. As wolves become more comfortable with humans, they have learned to change their behavior, making them effective livestock predators regardless of human population density.

Wolf Affects to Farmers and Ranchers:

As a cattle producer myself, I can attest to the impact of wolves on my family's farm. We raise cattle at the intersection of forested and agricultural lands, where wolf habitat meets directly with prime grazing lands for livestock coupled with quality ground for row crops to grow feed. This habitat dynamic puts increased pressure on my cattle, and I have personally dealt with wolf kills for nearly two decades. The loss of cattle is difficult to bear and creates a significant monetary loss for my farm. This firsthand experience has convinced me of the need for more options when it comes to managing wolves in Minnesota.

As the wolf population and territory has increased and expanded, this has caused serious management issues for my farm, with annual losses to wolf depredation becoming a normal occurrence. Beyond the economic repercussions of these losses, there also comes a psychological and emotional toll. Wolf killings on livestock can be devastating events, and the only recourse is through Minnesota's wolf depredation compensation program. In addition, verified wolf kills may also warrant the services of a certified trapper from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS).

Both programs are used extensively in Minnesota, with a need for more investment at both the state and federal levels. As a livestock producer, I would prefer having the tools in place to properly manage the wolf population on the front end, creating less of a need for recourse after an incident with my livestock. In addition, not all incidents are able to be recorded, leaving producers like me with no recourse at all. When producers like me are unable to prove and record loss of livestock to wolves, it puts us in a difficult position, knowing that we will no longer receive any compensation for the investment we have made into our livestock operations while also realizing that the predator which caused the harm will not be properly managed and left to act again.

Although wolves play a role in the ecosystem of Minnesota, there is a need for management of these animals that goes well beyond the current tools available to the citizens of Minnesota and the Federal and State governments.

The Need for More Management Tools

According to data published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 142 wolves were trapped and euthanized by USDA APHIS trappers. This number is higher than all other states combined, highlighting how concentrated wolf populations have become.

The volume of wolf interactions with livestock is driving this statistic and speaks to the need for wolf management to return to the states. As wolves are currently federally protected, Minnesotans are left with no ability to properly manage the wolf population, forcing corrective action after negative situations have occurred.

I encourage lawmakers to consider this data in their deliberations and would point out that allowing states to manage their own wolf populations does create a detriment to wolves. It simply allows for professionals in the wildlife biology and agricultural industries to properly control these populations for the benefit of humans, wildlife, and domesticated livestock.

In these deliberations, lawmakers should take care to include the appropriate industry, government, and academic partners to ensure the necessary options are available to manage wolves.

These options could include the use of traps and snares, the re-creation of a hunting and trapping season, and more investment in calculating and tracking wolf populations and territories. Additionally, resources created at the state level in Minnesota also highlight a healthy investment in attempting to mitigate wolf interactions. The state of Minnesota currently has the Wolf-Livestock Conflict Prevention Grant program, helping producers to receive funding to help mitigate wolf interactions on their farms. This is an example of attempting to alleviate the issue before a negative situation arises.

The more data that is available will allow Minnesotans the ability to have a true understanding of the scope of wolves in our state and guide our leaders in their ability to provide the appropriate resources to maintain a healthy and properly managed wolf population.

In the current situation, where wolves are not allowed to be managed except in specific instances, we are left in a reactionary state, unable to handle the situation that individuals like me are experiencing every day in our communities.

Conclusion:

Across the state of Minnesota, citizens are discussing the role wolves play in our ecological process. Although wolves are an important predator species, wildlife biology requires balance to maintain quality habitat and healthy populations of a variety of species.

In the farming and ranching community, the consistent concern wolf interactions create with livestock creates a great deal of emotional and economic stress, putting livestock producers in a no-win situation with no end in sight.

I encourage the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries to continue engaging in this very important topic and would ask that Congress pass legislation removing the federal protections wolves currently receive to allow states to play their part in managing this predatory species.

Without proper management options, the wolf population in Minnesota and across the country will only continue to grow to unmanageable levels, creating more harm to livestock producers and the communities within the wolf range.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you. Thank you, Representative Nelson.
I now recognize Dr. Roberts for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF NATHAN ROBERTS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR FOR CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, COLLEGE OF THE OZARKS, POINT LOOKOUT, MISSOURI

Dr. ROBERTS. Thank you, Chairman Bentz, and thank you, Committee members, for the opportunity to be here today to speak about wolf recovery.

A year ago, I testified that the gray wolf has recovered and should be removed from the Endangered Species Act. I still stand by that statement today. The wolf has recovered in the United States. The established recovery plan for the Great Lakes region set clear, numeric goals to serve as criteria for determining successful recovery. Those criteria have been exceeded every year since at least 1994, with an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 individuals in this region alone.

Again, I note that every wolf on the landscape in the Great Lakes region today was born long after recovery goals were met. Some argue that states will eradicate wolves if state management

authority is returned. Some jurisdictions may continue state or tribal-level protections, while others may allow for some regulated take.

While states may vary on how large the population should be, they all plan for and set policies to have sustainable and secure populations. Some states would likely reduce populations to achieve management goals, but no states are suggesting a dire desire to remove wolves altogether. In fact, all states with wolves have a stated goal of maintaining a population that ensures the long-term viability of wolves.

It is critical to recognize there is a fundamental difference between desiring no wolves at all versus scientifically and responsibly managing wolves to establish population goals, which in some cases may mean less wolves. Many states, based on their respective wolf management plans, may have the need to have fewer wolves than current numbers, but that does not mean they desire to eradicate the species.

Some argue the number of wolves taken in recent years in areas or times when wolves are not listed is alarming. Hunting of any species causes short-term decline in the population as individuals are removed. The actual number of animals removed is not the important metric to consider. Rather, the population trajectory viewed on an annual basis is more informative when considering the long-term viability of a population. In other words, what we really want to know is if the population is increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable from year to year.

Jurisdictions use a variety of techniques and methods to estimate population trajectory of wolves. State fish and wildlife agencies have successfully managed countless species this way over the past century, from waterfowl to upland birds, deer, and elk. Monitoring programs allow for evaluating population responses to management actions and changes. These methods are well established and supported by peer-reviewed literature. We could be confident the wolf population is at least as large as estimates suggest because jurisdictions are using scientifically sound methods to produce these estimates. Similarly, we could be confident that the potential impacts of management actions can be evaluated and adapted as needed.

Wolves are resilient. Peer-reviewed scientific information can give us insight as to what level of take is sustainable. Published scientific work has found that take rates up to 29 percent resulted in no decrease in annual population trajectory. The distribution of wolves further contributes to this resiliency, as wolves are represented by several meta populations that collectively compose the overall population. In the unlikely event that a meta population were to experience severe population declines, these could be mitigated by the other sub populations.

The Department of the Interior appropriately recognizes resiliency in their final rule published in 2020. Some have concern that wolves are not found throughout their historic range. Wolves are restored in the Great Lakes and Rocky Mountain regions. However, it is true they are not found throughout their complete historic range. This does not mean the species is threatened. There are

enough wolves in these established populations to ensure that wolves will remain in the United States.

Most species are not bound throughout their historic range. Elk and black bear, for example, are still absent for much of their historic range. However, elk and bears, like wolves, are still secure. States can restore native species in the absence of ESA protections. There are active programs in several states to restore elk and ruffed grouse even though these species are not federally listed.

Failing to recognize that wolves are recovered undermines the intention of the ESA. The Act was intended to provide temporary protection and funding until a species met established recovery goals, at which time states are to regain management authority through delisting. Gray wolves are recovered in the United States. The science is clear: The species is recovered, secure, and recovery goals have been met many times over. States have the ability, and an undeniable track record of species management and recovery, to manage the species effectively and sustainably for the benefit of the public they serve. Wolves are restored. Now it is time to restore management to the states. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Roberts follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NATHAN M. ROBERTS, PhD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR FOR
CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, COLLEGE OF THE OZARKS

Members of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to speak about wolf management. A year ago, I testified in this committee that the gray wolf in the United States is recovered, no longer in danger of extinction, and should be removed from the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). I stand by this statement still today. The wolf is recovered in the United States. The established recovery plan in Great Lakes region set clear numeric goals to serve as criteria for determining successful recovery. These goals have been exceeded every year since at least 1994, approaching three decades now, with an estimated 4,000–5,000 individuals in this region alone. Again, I note that, given the natural life span of wolves, every wolf on the landscape in the Great Lakes region was born long after recovery goals were met.

Some argue that states will eradicate wolves if management authority is returned to state jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions may continue state or tribal level protections while others may allow some regulated take. However, every state with wolves has a goal of sustaining a wolf population within their borders. While states may vary on how large the population should be, they all plan for, and set policies, to have a sustainable and secure population. The agencies charged with managing wolves in these jurisdictions will be accountable to the public they serve. Similarly, elected bodies that wade into wolf management will also be accountable to their respective electorates. While some states will reduce populations to achieve population goals, no states are suggesting they desire to remove populations altogether. In fact, all states with wolves have a stated goal of maintaining a population that ensures the long-term viability of wolves within their state. It is critical to recognize that there is a difference between scientifically and responsibly managing wolves to established population goals which may mean less wolves on the landscape and desiring no wolves at all. Many states, based on their wolf management plans, may have the need to have fewer wolves than current numbers, but that does not mean they desire to eradicate the species.

Some argue that the number of wolves taken in recent years, in areas or times when wolves are not listed, is alarming. Hunting of any species causes a short-term decline in the population as individuals are removed. The actual number of animals removed, or percentage of the population removed, is not the important metric to consider. Rather, the population trajectory, viewed on an annual basis, is more informative when considering the long-term viability of a population. In other words, what we really want to know is if the population is increasing, declining, or remaining stable from year to year. Jurisdictions use a variety of techniques and methods to estimate the geographic range and population trajectory of wolves. State

fish and wildlife agencies have successfully managed countless species this way over the past century from waterfowl to upland birds, deer, and elk. These methods are well established and supported by peer-reviewed literature. It is impossible to know the absolute number of any species, including humans, but estimates yielded from scientifically-sound methods are reliable and allow for monitoring of the species. These monitoring programs allow for evaluating population responses to management actions and changes. We can be confident that the wolf population is at least as large as estimates suggest because jurisdictions are using scientifically sound, defensible methods to produce these population estimates. Similarly, we can be confident that the potential impacts of management actions, or changes to management programs, can be evaluated and adapted as needed.

Wolves are resilient. Peer-reviewed, scientific information can give us insight to what level of take is sustainable. Adams *et al.* (2008) is a published scientific work that found that harvest, or hunting take, rates up to 29% result in no decreases in annual population trajectory. The distribution of wolves further contributes to this resiliency as wolves in the contiguous United States are represented by several meta-populations that collectively compose the overall population. Multiple established meta-populations help ensure that the overall population is robust and resilient to unforeseen events. In the unlikely event that a meta-population were to experience severe population declines, the impact on the overall population can be mitigated by the other subpopulations. Indeed, the Department of Interior appropriately recognized this resiliency in their final rule published in 2020.

Some have concern that wolves are not found throughout their historic range. Wolves are restored in the Great Lakes and Rocky Mountain regions. However, it is true that they are not found throughout their complete historic range. This does not mean that the species is threatened. There are enough wolves in these established populations to ensure that wolves will remain in the United States. Most species are not found throughout their historic range. Elk and black bears, for example, are still absent from much of their historic range. They, like wolves, are still secure. States can restore native species in the absence of ESA protections. There are active programs in several states to restore elk and ruffed grouse—even though these species are not federally listed.

Failing to recognize that wolves are recovered undermines the intention of the ESA. The Act was intended to provide temporary protection and funding until a species met established recovery goals; at which time the states are to regain management authority following delisting. By not delisting wolves, even after they have far exceeded recovery goals, the integrity of the ESA is compromised. Funding, and other resources are encumbered for wolves, a recovered species, that could otherwise be dedicated to species in true need of assistance. Disregarding scientifically based recovery goals further disincentivizes jurisdictions from pursuing endangered species recovery or embarking on partnerships to restore species that are imperiled. Public support for imperiled species conservation erodes when citizens see abundant species classified as ‘endangered’ despite ample data, and scientific consensus, that suggest otherwise. The public, especially those that live in the core of wolf range, experience both the positive, and negative impacts of wolves. The public were assured in the recovery plan that wolves would be delisted once they were recovered. These citizens were further told the clear criteria used to determine if wolves have been recovered. However, after meeting these criteria for almost thirty years, the public are still waiting to see wolves delisted. We have a population that has been recovered for almost three decades and is at least an order of magnitude above established and agreed recovery goals, yet is still listed. Unfortunately, the result is that science is devalued, partnerships are avoided, the public is disillusioned, and conservation suffers.

Gray wolves are recovered in the United States. The science is clear; this species is recovered, secure, and recovery goals have been met many times over. States have the ability, and an undeniable track record of species management and recovery, to effectively and sustainably manage this species for the benefit of the public they serve. This is why the federal government, and so many states, have appropriately supported delisting again and again. It is time to delist wolves.

Citation:

ADAMS, L.G., STEPHENSON, R.O., DALE, B.W., AHGOOK, R.T. and DEMMA, D.J. (2008), Population Dynamics and Harvest Characteristics of Wolves in the Central Brooks Range, Alaska. Wildlife Monographs, 170: 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.2193/2008-012>

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Dr. Roberts.
I now recognize Mr. John Williams for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JOHN WILLIAMS, WOLF COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR, OREGON CATTLEMAN'S ASSOCIATION, ENTERPRISE, OREGON

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Chairman and Representatives.

With wolves expanding to many areas of Oregon, livestock producers need relief from the economic devastation and the emotional stress they are enduring as wolves impact nearly every aspect of their operation. We need to be able to have the ability to protect ourselves, our families, and our private property, including our livestock, from wolves. Ranchers are at risk of losing their ranches, their way of life, their homes, and their income. The production losses due to the presence of wolves, which is much larger than the dead and injured animals, all lead to a significant emotional stress to the ranching community.

To be able to do this, wolves must be removed from the Endangered Species Act. In Oregon, the wolf was removed from the Oregon ESA in 2015 because the wolf population had met the required criteria, and the expansion of the wolf across much of the state has created a robust wolf population. The eastern quarter of the state is also federally delisted as well. It gives us hope that the rest of our ranchers can gain access to wolf management that includes removal of problem wolves when attacks on livestock become chronic.

Ranchers living in the three quarters of the state west of the arbitrary line of Highway 395, 78, and 95 are living under the wolves being protected under the ESA. They have no way of defending themselves against a wolf attack. Even if a rancher sees a wolf attacking his cattle, he cannot harm the wolf. Wolves kill livestock as a normal action of their lives. They kill to eat. They kill to train their young, and they sport kill. Ranchers many times only find one in eight of the carcasses, as identified by the Oakleaf study from Idaho.

In the process of killing, the wolves traumatize the cattle that are involved in the event. The normal hunting method of a wolf includes running down their prey. Sometimes a cow will not run but turn and fight to defend their young, or they must fight because their herd is cornered. Either way, as multiple events occur, most if not all of the herd becomes traumatized.

The effect of the losses to the producer both increases the producer's direct costs of doing business and reduce the revenue received. The list of the costs include depredations, reduced weaning weights, weight loss of cows, conception rate reductions, and management costs. First four are lost income to the producer because of the reduced cattle performance or physical loss of the animals.

The last item, management costs, encompasses a large group of issues that cause increased cost of operation. Management issues can be broken down into the cost of implementing nonlethal activities to attempt to mitigate the impact of the wolf's presence: management costs due to the implementation of government regulations and management plans, increased cost of livestock handling,

increased cost through injury and death of the livestock, and the loss of range access because the wolf's presence in given places makes it unwise to run livestock in that specific area.

To put some of the context of these losses for ranchers taken from a paper I wrote in 2010, for a rancher with 400 head of cattle, the presence of wolves creates a reduced conception rate of about 10 percent, which costs the rancher \$134 a head; reduced weaning weight, \$46; depredation, \$50; reduced cow weight, \$57; and increased management costs, \$93, all for a total of \$380 per head to each and every cow that is impacted by wolves.

To add to this, this adds up to \$152,000 for a 400-head operation. The losses are just not economic; they are also emotional and social. Management costs related to the expected nonlethal are both time and money. The time issue becomes critical as ranchers work to protect their herds, losing family time and time away from their normal ranching activities. Ranchers feel abandoned when wolves have to be managed under the Federal ESA. Wolves cannot be harmed in any way even though they are tearing their animals apart.

To state the obvious, wolves are controversial. Wolf management occurs in three arenas: economic, social, and political. Ranchers and hunters are the only ones economically impacted directly by the economic costs. Unfortunately, wolf management and wolf policy is mostly impacted by the social arena, and the decisions are made in the political arena.

Ranchers need to be able to have control over their lives, their ranches, and their livestock. To accomplish this, we must remove the wolves from the Endangered Species Act. Evidence to support this can be seen in the rapid expansion of wolves into new areas like California and western Oregon and increase in numbers of the wolves throughout their occupied range. Wolves don't need the protection of the single species management of the Endangered Species Act.

Thank you for the opportunity for ranchers to explain their impacts.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Williams follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN WILLIAMS, OREGON CATTLEMAN'S ASSOCIATION,
WOLF COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR

As a cattle rancher in my younger days I learned the cattle industry from the ground up. As an Oregon State University Extension Agent for over 31 years, including over 10 years of studying the impact of the presence of wolves on livestock I have learn how devastating the reintroduction of wolves to the western landscape is to ranchers and their communities. In 1996 Mack Birkmaier, local rancher and past president of the Oregon Cattleman's Association came into my office and told me that an issue was coming that would hit the livestock industry like no other issue in his lifetime . . . The wolf . . . and he wanted the university to engage in research before they came to be able to scientifically show how disruptive they would be.

I joined a group of researchers from Oregon State University, the Agricultural Research Service and University of Idaho in a long-term research project looking at the impacts of the presence of wolves on cattle. Four peer reviewed publication have been published and several non-peer reviewed but ground truthed papers were written. A shortened version of two of those papers are included in the supplementary information for this hearing. A bibliography of those documents is included at the end of this testimony.

In my retirement I took on the co-chair of the wolf committee for the Oregon Cattleman's Association and continue to work to improve the management of the wolves and to influence the decision making surrounding wolves as it is truly devastating the cattle industry across the west. In areas where the wolf is protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act, wolves attack livestock with impunity and the rancher has no recourse. Some wolves have killed dozens of livestock and cannot be harmed.

My Experience with the Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment is that even though we need the wolves removed from the Federal ESA through administrative means, the court system will relist them every time until there is congressional action that delists them. Thank you for the opportunity to present the following oral testimony.

I am John Williams, rancher from NE Oregon and I am here today representing the Oregon Cattleman's Association as the co-chair of wolf committee.

With the wolves expanding to many areas of Oregon, livestock producers need relief from the economic devastation and the emotional stress they are enduring as wolves' impact nearly every aspect of their operation.

We need to be able to have the ability to protect ourselves, our families and our private property, including our livestock, from wolves. Ranchers are at risk of losing their ranches, their way of life, their homes and their incomes. The production losses due to the presence of wolves, which are much larger than the dead and injured animals all leads to significant emotional stress to the ranching community.

To be able to do this, wolves must be removed from the Endangered Species Act. In Oregon, the wolf was removed from the Oregon ESA in 2015 because the wolf population had met the required criteria and the expansion of the wolf across much of the state has creating a robust wolf population. The eastern $\frac{1}{4}$ of the state is federally delisted as well. It gives us hope that the rest of our ranchers can gain access to wolf management that includes removal of problem wolves when attacks on livestock become chronic. Ranchers living in the $\frac{3}{4}$ of the state west of the arbitrary line of Hwy 395/78/95 are living under wolves being protected under the federal ESA. They have no way of defending themselves against a wolf attack, even if a rancher sees a wolf attacking his cattle, he cannot harm the wolf.

Wolves kill livestock as a normal action of their lives. They kill to eat, they kill to train their young and they sport kill. Ranchers, many times, only find 1 in 8 of the carcasses as identified in the Oakleaf study from Idaho. In the process of killing, the wolves traumatize the cattle that are involved in the event. The normal hunting method of a wolf includes running down their prey. Sometimes a cow will not run, but turn and fight to defend their young or must fight when the herd is cornered. Either way as multiple events occur, most if not all, of the herd becomes traumatized.

The Effect of the losses to the producer both increase the producer's direct costs of doing business and reduces the revenue received. The list of costs includes: depredations, reduced weaning weight of calves, weight loss by cows, conception rate reductions and management costs. The first four are lost income to the producer because of reduced cattle performance or physical loss of the animals. The last item, management costs, encompasses a large group of issues that cause increased cost of operation. Management issues can be broken down into costs of implementing non-lethal activities to attempt to mitigate the impact of the wolf's presence; management costs due to implementation of government regulations and management plans; increased costs of livestock handling; increased costs through injury and death of livestock; and the loss of range access because the wolf's presence in given places makes it unwise, to run livestock in that specific area of range.

To put some context to these losses for a rancher, taken from a paper I wrote in 2010 . . . For a rancher with 400 head of cattle, the presence of wolves creates a reduced conception rate of about 10%, which costs a rancher \$134.00 per head; Reduced weaning weight, \$46.00; Depredations \$50.00; reduced cow weight, \$57.00 AND increased management costs \$93.00, this all totals up to \$380.00 per head for each and every cow impacted by the wolves. That adds up to \$152,000 for a rancher running 400 head.

The losses are not just economic, they are also emotional and social. Management costs relating to the expected non-lethal are both time and money. The time issue becomes critical as ranchers work to protect their herds, losing family time and time away from their normal ranching activities.

Ranchers feel abandoned when wolves have to be managed under the Federal ESA. Wolves cannot be harmed in any way, even though they are tearing our livestock to pieces.

To state the obvious, wolves are controversial. Wolf management occurs in three arenas, Economic, Social and Political. Ranchers and hunters are the only ones economically impacted directly by the economic costs. Unfortunately wolf management and wolf policy is most impacted by the social arena and the decisions are made in the political arena.

Ranchers need to be able to have some control over their lives, their ranches and their livestock. To accomplish this, we must remove the wolves from the endangered species act. Evidence to support this can be seen in the rapid expansion of wolves into new areas like California and western Oregon and increase in numbers of wolves throughout their occupied range. Wolves don't need the protection of the single species management of the Endangered Species Act.

Thank you for the opportunity for ranchers to explain the impacts of the presence of wolves on our lives.

Publications:

P.E. Clark, D.E. Johnson, L.L. Larson, et al. 2017. *Effects of Wolf Presence on Daily Travel Distance of Range Cattle*. Journal of Rangeland Ecology & Management 70 (2017) 657-665. 8pp.

Williams, J., D.E. Johnson, P.E. Clark, et al. 2017. *Wolves—A Primer for Ranchers. E.M. 9142*. Oregon State University, Corvallis, Or. 12 pp. Peer reviewed numbered Extension Methods publication. (Truncated version in supporting materials)

P.E. Clark, J. Chigbrow, D.E. Johnson, et al. *Predicting Spatial Risk of Wolf-Cattle Encounters and Depredation*. Rangeland Ecology & Management. Volume 73, Issue 1, January 2020, Pages 30-52.

Cooke, R.F., B.I. Cappellozza, M.M. Reis, et al. 2013. *Impact of previously exposure to wolves on temperament and physiological responses of beef cattle following a simulated wolf encounter*. BEEF107-Special report.

Williams, J. 2010. *Estimates of Economic Losses to Stock Growers due to the Presence of Wolves in North Eastern Oregon*. OSU Extension Service. Enterprise, OR (not peer reviewed, extensive ground truthing). (Truncated version in supporting materials)

Other relevant papers:

Oakleaf, J., C. Mack, and D. Murry. 2003. Effects of Wolves on Livestock Calf Survival and Movement in Central Idaho. Journal of Wildlife Management 67(2):299-306

Tanaka, J.A., Neil R. Rimbey, L. Allen Torell, et al. 2007. Grazing Distribution: The Quest for the Silver Bullet. Rangelands 29(4):38-46. [http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.2111/1551-501X\(2007\)29%5B38%3AGDTQFT%5D2.0.CO%3B2](http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.2111/1551-501X(2007)29%5B38%3AGDTQFT%5D2.0.CO%3B2)

Steele J., Rashford B., Foulke T., et al. Wolf (Canis lupus) Predation Impacts on livestock Production: Direct Effects, Indirect Effects, and Implications for Compensation Ratios. 2013. Journal of Rangeland Ecology & Management 66: 539-544.

The following document was submitted as a supplement to Mr. Williams' testimony.

John Williams
Oregon Cattleman's Association Wolf Committee co-chair



Estimates of Economic Losses to Stock Growers due to the Presence of Wolves in North Eastern Oregon

By
John Williams
Associate Professor, OSU Extension Service
Wallowa County, OR
September 2010 (Updated September 2015)

Abstract

While any benefits associated with the introduction of wolves in NE Oregon are primarily nonmarket based, difficult to quantify and widely distributed among possibly millions of people who value wolves, at least some of the costs of introducing wolves in NE Oregon are market based, can be accurately estimated and are focused on the producers and the local economies to which they contribute. North Eastern Oregon includes 5 counties. The livestock producer is on the front line of the wolf/livestock conflict and the losses to the producer both increase the producer's direct costs of doing business and reduces the revenue received in those businesses thereby negatively affecting both sides of their balance sheet. The following economic assessment is based on the assumption that the ranches are in areas where wolves have reached full occupancy and that the cattle are in areas where wolves are present through all seasons of the year.

Estimates of Economic Losses to Stock Growers due to the Presence of Wolves in North Eastern Oregon

Discussions about wolf impacts on livestock producers have focused on the depredation losses and what portion of the actual losses to wolves is found and confirmed. Those confirmed losses generally are reported to be 1 confirmed carcass for every 8 actual losses (Oakleaf, 2003). Even though those numbers are substantial and can cause significant impact to the bottom line of a rancher's business they significantly underestimate all the costs related to wolves, both the probable yet difficult to confirm depredation costs and the increased costs associated with physical stress to the cattle and management costs to the producer. In fact, these unacknowledged direct and indirect costs may be considerably greater than the directly confirmed depredation costs. Reports from ranchers who have dealt with wolves in the years since they were reintroduced in Idaho and Wyoming discuss the non-lethal costs and the increased management costs as much as they do the depredation.

The list of costs include but are not limited to depredation, reduced weight gain for calves, weight loss by cows, conception rate reductions and management costs. The first four are lost income to the producer because of reduced performance or physical loss of the stock (both calves and cows are reported to be lost). The last item, management costs, encompasses a large group of issues that cause increased cost of operation.

Management issues can be broken down into costs of implementing non-lethal activities to attempt to mitigate the impact of the wolf's presence; management costs due to implementation of government regulations and management plans; increased costs of livestock handling, management and range management; increased costs through injury and death of livestock; and the loss of range access because the wolf presence in given places makes it unwise to run livestock in that specific area of range.

Some of these issues are relatively easy to quantify estimates of the loss or expense, others will require much more study and basic data collection before adequate information is available to estimate the magnitude of the loss. Additionally, not all ranchers will experience all of these impacts at the same time.

The reduced performance issues and some of the management costs are estimated below. The cost of loss of rangeland access can be estimated from a previous paper written by Bruce Sorte and John Williams titled "Potential Wallowa County Economic Impacts of the Reduction or Elimination of Cattle Grazing in the Joseph Creek Rangeland Analysis." This paper analyzed the potential loss of grazing permits by 12 permittees due to a lawsuit. The loss was a 1,800 head reduction in carrying capacity on the land and was analyzed as potentially permanent. In that paper it states "the federal land dependent ranches would lose roughly \$104,883 in annual gross sales per ranch." While the exact

amount would vary by the size of the ranch and the amount of area lost, this estimate provides a useful reference to value grazing land and what happens when it becomes unavailable for whatever reason.

The increased cost due to implementing some non-lethal activities and management costs due to implementation of government regulations and management plans is estimated below.

The most problematic issues, and issues not covered in this analysis are the increased costs of livestock handling, management and range management and the increased costs through injury and death loss of calves being trampled by the cows during wolf attacks. What is reported from ranchers in wolf country (Thomas, 2010) is that cattle become much more nervous and difficult to handle. A new analysis of this is covered in a published paper titled Impact of previous exposure to wolves on temperament and physiological responses of beef cattle following a simulated wolf encounter which looks at the temperament change, blood Cortisol changes and body temperature changes. New techniques are required to make even simple field to field management moves, which is a management practice that ranchers have been increasing to improve the rangeland health. Cattle are reported to be "constantly on the move," refusing to stay where they are placed on the range. Management with cattle dogs becomes much more difficult and often not possible, thus requiring additional cowboys. If dogs are used, the cattle "stay all stirred up and all they do is fight the dogs." Maybe most disturbing and the hardest to quantify is the anxiety that wolves cause among ranchers and their employees forcing 24/7 vigilance that reduces ability to recover and remain productive day after day.

The economic impacts are not all on the producers. There are three types of effects 1) direct effects or sales by ranchers, 2) indirect effects or sales by suppliers, and 3) induced effects or household expenditures of income received while working in the ranching or supplier industries. When the losses to the ranching sector of the economy are as significant as identified below it is necessary to point out that these are only the output or direct effects. If you have \$ 231 of decreased revenue per head and the multiplier based on the recent Input/output model as 1.8 for the cattle industry in Wallowa County the total figure of indirect and direct of \$415.80 per head just within Wallowa County. That figure would be much larger for NE Oregon.

This economic analysis is based on the following assumptions:

- The ranches are in areas where wolves have reached full occupancy***
- Wolves are present over a significant portion of range and ranching operations in NE Oregon
- Producers average 400 mother cows; therefore, costs are spread over all cattle on a per head basis.
- Expected sale price of \$2.40/lb weaned calf⁹
- Normal or "pre-wolf" sale weight of 560 lbs**

* Based on a review of cattle fax prices and other cattle market information.

** Oregon Agriculture Information Network of OSU/NE Oregon data

***Full occupancy is the condition where wolves' density is such that if young wolves are forced out of the pack they move to outside areas. Wolf competition is significant and there are very few areas that are not considered part of a pack's territory

Decreased Revenues

Reduced conception rate costs

Reduced conception rate by 10% (per Casey Anderson's ****statements)

400 head X 10% = **40 head** reduced calves born X 560 lbs X \$2.40 = \$1,344 per head

40 X \$1,344 = \$53,760.00 \$53,760.00/400 head = **\$134.40 per head**

Depredation calf kills

15 head lost (Estimate of losses from Wallowa County producers)

560 lbs X \$2.40 = \$1,344 per head X 15 head X \$1,344/head = \$20,160 / 400 head = **\$50.40 per head**

Reduced weaning/sale weights

35 lbs estimated loss of weaned calf weight (Research paper quotes 60 lbs, local estimate is more conservative)

560 lbs - 35 lbs = 525 lbs/head weaning weight \$25 lbs X \$2.45 = \$1,286.25 per head (lighter weight ...

price per lb goes up)

\$1,344.00 - \$1,286.25 = \$57.75/head @ 80% weaning (down after conception and death loss)

\$57.75 X 320 head (80% weaning rate of 400 head) = \$18,480.00 / 400 head = **\$46.20 per head**

Increased Costs**Cow body condition losses**

Loss of one body condition score from 5 to 4 (per Casey Anderson's statements)
 Cows should be body condition score 5 at calving to avoid jeopardizing the cows health or life
 Cost of feeding a cow adequately to regain the 90 to 95 lbs (1 body condition score) during the winter so she is in condition for calving is **\$56.70 per head** (Cost of grain and increased hay value.)*****

Increased management costs*****

Time spent by manager 1/2 day for 4 months Assume \$5,000/month \$5,000 X .5 = \$2,500 per month
 \$2,500 X 4 months = \$10,000

Also

9 months hired help @ \$150 per day (what paying current range rider to attempt to mitigate wolf loss)

20 days a month 20 X \$150 = \$3,000 per month ... 9 months X \$3,000 = \$27,000

Total labor costs \$27,000 + \$10,000 = \$37,000

\$37,000 / 400 head = **\$92.50 per head**

Total losses

Depredation calf kills	\$50.40 per head
Reduced weaning weights	\$46.20 per head
Cow body condition loss	\$56.70 per head
Reduced conception rate costs	\$134.40 per head
Increased management costs	\$92.50 per head

Estimated Cost of wolves to a ranching system

\$380.20 per head

Annual Estimated Cost of Wolves to a 400 Cow Operation					
Trail	Wolf Effect	No Wolves	Wolves Present	Net Loss (count)	Net Loss (\$)
Conception Rate	Decrease from 90% to 80%	360 hd	320 hd	40 hd	\$53,760
Weaning Weight	Decrease weight by 35 lbs	560 lbs	525 lbs	35 lbs	\$18,480
Death Loss	Increase from 2% to 5.75%	8 hd	23 hd	15 hd	\$20,160
Cow Body Condition Score (BCS)	Decrease from 5 to 4	5 BCS	4 BCS	1 BCS	\$22,680
Increased Labor Costs	Manager 1/2 for 4 months Hired hand 1 for 9 months	n/a	Manager: \$2500/month Hired help: \$3000/month		\$37,000
				Total Loss	\$152,080

**** Casey Anderson is a rancher in Idaho that has had significant wolf presence on his ranch, has detailed cow and calf production records, and is a partner in the OSU research titled "Evaluation of Wolf Impacts on Cattle Productivity and Behavior"

Casey wrote: "In the last seven years wolves have become increasingly common, having moved into our area from central Idaho. Over this period we have seen a dramatic increase in livestock losses; confirmed wolf kills, suspected wolf kills and cattle that simply disappear. In 2010 we have nearly 20 confirmed or probable wolf kills but the full extent of losses will not be known until we gather in the late fall. We expect that when the counting is complete, we will have lost in excess of 60 calves. Wolves are known to take cows and bulls as well as calves. Last year we were short 15 cows and a bull at the end of the grazing season".

*****Body condition scores are numbers used to suggest the relative fatness or body composition of the cow.

SCORE 4 = The cow appears thin, with ribs easily visible and the backbone showing. The spinous processes (along the edge of the loin) are still very sharp and barely visible individually. Muscle tissue is not depleted through the shoulders and hindquarters.

SCORE 5. The cow may be described as moderate to thin. The last two ribs can be seen and little evidence of fat is present in the brisket, over the ribs, or around the tail head. The spinous processes are now smooth and no longer individually identifiable.

To gain 1 lb per day in the winter time, nutrition would have to be increased significantly. Rations were changed from 14 lbs of meadow hay, 5 lbs of Oat hay, 2 lbs of barley and 2 lbs of bluegrass/wheat straw TO; 12 lbs of grass hay (\$150/ton), 9 lbs of alfalfa hay (\$200/ton) and 4 lbs of Barley (\$180/ton). The cost of feed per day rose from \$1.53/day to \$2.16 per day. OSU Cowculator⁶ was used to balance the ration.

*****Management costs, based on Wallowa County experiences, include

Managers time spent in spring and early summer (.5 person X 4 months) time spent working on putting out rag boxes, fladry use, increased checks during calving, time with ODFW and Wildlife Services on depredation losses, the time in meetings and work sessions related to permits and other programs. Delayed turnout requiring additional feed period close to buildings, use of telemetry to attempt to keep track of livestock when wolves were in close proximity. Disposing of livestock carcasses through county landfill, cleaning up bone piles by burying bone piles or removing to land fill. This time is focused, but not exclusively, during calving and early turn out season. Assume Managers salary and OPE @ \$60,000.00 per year.

Employee time is based on the need for additional rider and range work. Assumes April when turn out starts in the county through December when the majority of cattle have been gathered and are returned to headquarters or in the valleys. This employee would be riding in the areas where summer and fall pastures occur, dealing with the nervous cattle, keeping cattle where placed, aiding in cattle moves due to inability to use dogs, increased time fencing, etc.

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WOLVES – A PRIMER FOR RANCHERS

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Abstract: Ranch management has become more complex since wolves were reintroduced into Idaho and Wyoming in 1996. In wolf areas, livestock have experienced increased death loss and greater stress. Increased livestock aggressiveness has been observed, especially toward working dogs, making handling livestock more difficult. Additionally ranchers have reported a loss of body condition, lower conception rates, increased time and expense for management. Our study was designed to investigate the effect of wolf presence on cattle behavior, landscape use patterns, and resource selection by comparing high wolf density areas against low wolf density areas. This study also generated baseline information on cattle spatial behavior before wolves were on the landscape. A Before-After/Control-Impact Paired (BACIP) experimental design was used. Control study areas in Idaho (3) have high wolf presence while Impact study areas in Oregon (3) started with no wolf presence, and are shifting to elevated wolf presence. Paired Idaho and Oregon areas have similar topography, vegetation composition, wild ungulate prey bases, and livestock management. Cows are tracked at 5-minute intervals using GPS collars (10 per area) throughout the grazing season. Wolf presence is monitored by GPS, trail cameras, and scat surveys. Ten GPS-collared cattle in an Idaho study area encountered a GPS-collared wolf 783 times at less than 500 meters during 137 days in the 2009 grazing season. At 100 meters there were 53 encounters; 52 at night. Tests of naïve and experienced cattle exposed to a simulated wolf encounter found increased excitability and fear-related physiological stress responses in cows previously exposed to wolves. This was shown through increased cortisol levels, body temperature and temperament scores. Cattle presence near occupied houses doesn't offer protection from wolves. Data shows wolves within 500m of occupied houses 588 times during 198 days of tracking. Many confirmed depredations on this site were also close to houses.

Key Words: *Canis lupus*, Cattle depredations, GPS collars, wolf-cattle encounters, Wolf, Wolf impacts, Wolf presence, and wolf presence costs.

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Research Project Study Areas

Ranch management has become more complex since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reintroduced wolves into Idaho and Wyoming in 1996. In areas where wolves have migrated, ranchers and government officials have verified increased death loss and injury of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and llamas) and dogs. In addition to mortality of stock and companion animals, ranchers have reported losses caused indirectly by wolves, such as calves being trampled while the mother cow is fighting wolves, increased injury to livestock resulting in increased veterinary care and treatment costs, and increased stress on livestock and ranching families.

Ranchers also report increased livestock aggressiveness, especially toward working dogs, and other behavioral changes that make moving and handling livestock more difficult. Ranchers who have kept continuous records from the pre-wolf period report a loss of body condition in cattle and lower calving rates, which directly impact ranch income. Ranch managers also report increased time and expenses for range riding,

checking on herds, extra meetings, additional travel, and other management-related activities pertaining to dealing with a protected predator.

A clear need emerged for research assessing the impacts of wolf presence on livestock on the range. The goal of the research is to provide a basis for development of viable mitigation strategies to reduce wolf depredation, management strategies, and regulatory policies that protect ranching enterprises while meeting national wildlife management objectives.

Project Description

Oregon State University (OSU), University of Idaho (UI), and the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) initiated the Cattle-Wolf Interactions Research Project in 2008 to evaluate the effects of gray wolf presence on rangeland cattle production systems. The research was conducted in three study areas of high wolf presence in west-central Idaho and three study areas of low wolf presence in northeastern Oregon. Mature beef cows (*Bos taurus*) were tracked with custom-made GPS collars (Photo1) to record individual cow position at 5-minute intervals throughout the grazing season. A minimum of 10 cows on each of the 6 study areas carried GPS collars each year.

The study utilized an adaptive management process in which a committee of private and governmental stakeholders annually reviewed the interim findings from the project and then worked with the researchers and cooperating ranchers to refine existing research questions or pose new questions based on what they had learned.

Research in Idaho was conducted at three study areas in Adams and Washington counties within or near the Payette National Forest. This region had established wolf populations and documented wolf depredation before the study began in 2008. The four study areas in Oregon (three in 2008) were located in Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties within or near the Wallowa Whitman National Forest. The fourth pair of sites was added in 2009 as more GPS collars were constructed and tested. Each Oregon study area was chosen to pair, ecologically and managerially, with a corresponding Idaho study area. The Oregon study areas, however, contained no known active wolf packs prior to and throughout the study, although occasional, undocumented wolf presence could have occurred. Each of the eight study areas was a combination of United States Forest Service (USFS) grazing allotments and private lands encompassing 25 square miles or more.

Wolf presence in the study areas was monitored during the grazing season using a number of complementary approaches including GPS and VHF radio-collared wolves, wolf scat sampling routes, trail cameras, direct observation, and depredation reports. Wolf presence levels were classified from low to high among and within grazing seasons using this information.

Data Collection Procedures

In early spring 2008, as part of the overall project, researchers placed 10 GPS collars on mature beef cows within a herd of 450 cow-calf pairs grazing one of the western Idaho study areas. This ranch is in the rugged area east of Hells Canyon of the Snake River and south of the Seven Devils Mountains. Cow collars logged a position every 5 minutes through the grazing season.

Later that spring, the ranch experienced serious wolf depredation of heifers (uncollared) in the calving pasture near the ranch headquarters. Depredations continued, and in late summer 2009 most of the offending 13-member wolf pack was lethally removed by APHIS Wildlife Services. A sub-dominant male wolf (B446) from that pack was captured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) and collared with a GPS tracking collar on May, 22, 2009. Wolf B446 and a radio-collared female were subsequently spared for research purposes. Wolf B446 was tracked at 15-minute intervals for 192 days (~18,000 positions) as it ranged throughout the study area.

The activities of wolf B446 and his interactions with the GPS-collared mature cow herd and uncollared heifer herd led to a number of questions from stakeholders, particularly those from the ranching community. This publication is organized around key questions from ranchers, the research group, or the adaptive management committee. The GPS tracking data and other monitoring information that was collected allowed researchers to address some of these questions.

Answers to Stakeholder Questions

This long-term research project is composed of many individual studies. Some are ongoing. This report

includes information from both the studies that have been completed and those that are still in process, as well as knowledge gained by the cooperators and researchers during the study.

How did wolf B446 use our mountainous landscape?

Immediately following capture and collaring, wolf B446 moved northward 2.2 miles and stayed in that locale for a day and a half. He then traveled 9 miles southwest to the pack's den site. By the third day, this wolf appeared to be moving as if unhampered by the capture and handling procedure or the weight and bulk of the GPS collar. During the 192-day tracking period, wolf B446 traveled an average distance of 11.4 miles per day (standard deviation = 4.75 miles per day). Actual travel distance was probably somewhat farther than this estimate, since straight lines were used to connect the 15-minute GPS points while the wolf most likely followed a curvilinear (circuitous or winding) route across the terrain and around landscape features.

The home range of wolf B446, calculated as the area completely enclosing all GPS positions, was nearly 211 square miles with a perimeter of over 55 miles. Daily travel distance by wolf B446 varied substantially: minimum distance was 2.2 miles per day and the maximum distance was 27.4 miles per day. This wolf traveled a maximum of 6.3 miles in 1 hour and 8.4 miles in 2 hours, a gauge of his sustained travel speed. The wolf was observed traveling ridgelines across the landscape and often used forest roads as travel routes. Favorite stopping locations were on outcroppings or benches with a good view of valleys and meadows below. At times the wolf was located near human activity. About 3.1 percent of GPS positions were located within 547 yards (500 meters) of an occupied house in the study area.

Wolf B446 did most of his traveling at night. This wolf typically began moving between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. with maximum travel activity occurring near midnight. By 9:00 a.m., travel activity had clearly diminished.

What was the wolf movement in and around the heifer calving pasture?

The heifer calving pasture is located on private land within the general study area and encloses an open, grassy hillside with two creek drainages and a few scattered clumps of brush and trees. The pasture is visible for the most part, from the nearby ranch buildings and houses. The pasture was, indeed, a focal point in wolf B446 movement patterns for nearly a month following his capture and release.

Between May 25, 2009 and June 24, 2009 (30 days from when data for this analysis began to be collected), wolf B446 visited this calving area 15 times. This wolf typically traveled the 6 miles from the den site to heifer pasture in 2 hours 30 minutes, usually arriving within 1 hour of midnight (11 times). It was not unusual for wolf B446 to remain in the immediate vicinity of the calving heifers for extended periods, even during periods when ranch personnel were documented as being nearby. Six of the 15 wolf visits to the pasture lasted longer than 22 hours, which means the wolf remained in the locale through most of the daylight hours of the following day. Six visits lasted for 4 to 6 nighttime hours, and two visits were less than 2 hours. This leads us to the proposition that once wolf B446 identified a prey source, he tended to stay with it.

What were the locations and extent of wolf depredation associated with the heifers?

There were 17 confirmed or probable wolf depredations on this ranch during 2009. Nine of these were discovered on the calving pasture between May 10, 2009 and June 15, 2009. Given the openness of this pasture and frequency of visits by ranch personnel, it is likely that all wolf depredations that occurred here were discovered. Depredations that occurred in the study area at large were much more difficult to identify and document.

Most other depredations discovered in the broader study area were located close to roads. Roads varied from paved/graveled main roads to more primitive on-farm and four-wheel drive roads, all of which were traveled regularly by ranch personnel. Some depredations occurred quite close to occupied houses which, in this area, were typically located along main roads. The ranch, which has maintained detailed records on the cattle herd for many years, reported death losses in 2009 that were well above normal (estimated at 2% or less). Most of the more than fifty head found dead or missing in the study area were recorded as suspected wolf depredation losses.

Undiscovered depredations likely occurred in the rougher, more remote portions of the study area. These were visited less often and observation was obstructed by terrain and vegetation, making detection of dead or dying livestock more difficult. Of the few beef carcasses actually found in these remote areas, most were found

too late or were too thoroughly consumed or decomposed to allow precise determination of cause of death.

It has been observed that cattle often stand and fight when in close proximity to wolves. Flight events sometimes do occur with cattle, and sometimes the whole herd will run away from encounter locations, but cows usually remain within the immediate vicinity of an encounter. Ranchers tell us that they find places where the vegetation was severely trampled and the ground chewed up by hooves. On our other research sites, ranchers reported that calves were sometimes trampled to death while the mother cow was trying to protect it. Ranchers and ranch employees also report that some calves appear to be “killed on the ground”, even before they can get up. This may be related to the “freeze” response in young animals.

What interactions did wolf B446 have with GPS-collared mature cows with calves?

Ten mature cows out of a herd of 450 were GPS- collared on this ranch. The herd began the grazing season in April just above the Snake River at 1,500 feet elevation. As spring and summer progressed, the herd moved to higher and higher elevations, ending the summer in montane forests at nearly 6,000 feet. As these animals moved higher, they entered the area where wolf B446 and his associated pack was most active.

In late June, wolf B446 shifted focus from the pasture containing calving heifers (uncollared) to the mature cow herd that was grazing a mosaic of forest and meadow patches to the west of the ranch headquarters. From the first encounter between the wolf and a collared cow to the last encounter (November 3, 2009) was a period of 137 days. A documented encounter, interaction, or episode was defined as a pair of concurrent cow and wolf GPS positions within 547 yards (500 meters) or less from each other. All ten collared cows encountered B446 during this 137-day period.

A total of 783 wolf-cattle encounters were recorded in 2009. Of this total, 244 encounters involved wolf and cow being within 273 yards (250 meters) or less of each other and 53 encounters included wolf-cow proximity of less than 109 yards (100 meters).

Sometimes more than one collared cow encountered wolf B446 simultaneously; on one occasion, six cows were involved. A total of 448 separate events involving one or more collared cows that were within 547 yards (500 meters) of this wolf were recorded during the 2009 grazing season. Wolf-cow encounters of less than 109 yards (100 meters) were represented in 21 separate events with the longest event lasting just over 3 hours.

Most of these wolf-cow encounters at very close proximity occurred between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 4:00 am when the wolf was most active and cattle were probably bedded. It was also a period of the day when managers and range riders would not normally be present on the landscape.

It should be noted, given the relative temporal coarseness of the GPS tracking data (5-minute intervals for cattle and 15-minute intervals for the wolf), that actual wolf-cow separation distances could have been much less than reported here. Some depredation may have occurred during these encounters, since two of the ten collared cows came home at the end of the grazing season without their calves (Table 1).

Where did wolf-mature cow interactions occur?

Most of the wolf B446-mature cow interactions occurred in a shallow arc about 7.5 miles (12 km) long and 1.5 miles (2.4 km) wide extending along the productive stream-fed bottomlands occupied by ranch facilities, hay fields, and open pastures. This riverine lower valley also has a village, scattered farmsteads, houses, and the only paved highway in the local area. Other encounters occurred in the higher mountains about 3.5 miles east-northeast of ranch headquarters that cattle grazed during late summer and fall. Most close-range encounters (less than 109 yards or 100 meters) tended to occur in vegetation mosaics, composed of small patches of conifer forest and dry meadows located on the lower slopes of hills or in valley lowlands. In contrast to the depredations associated with the heifers, wolf encounters with the mature cow herd took place predominantly in rougher and less traveled areas of the landscape where cattle could not be easily or frequently observed by ranch personnel.

Does the presence of a dwelling reduce wolf activity?

The GPS tracking data indicate that wolf B446 approached within 547 yards (500 meters) of houses during 158 separate events between May 23, 2009 and November 30, 2009. These events account for about 4.6 percent of all wolf positions acquired during this period. If combined, the areas within 547 yards of occupied houses would represent about 3.1% of the total home range (211 square miles) used by this wolf. Thus, he occupied the 547 yard (500-meter) dwelling buffers at a slightly greater frequency than all the rest of his range (those areas not within

500 meters of a dwelling). He was located within 273 yards (250 meters) of a house 119 times and within 109 yards (100 meters) 27 times. The closest approach to a summer-occupied house was 50 feet (15 meters) and to a house occupied year-round 220 feet (67 meters).

On one occasion (6/17/2009), the pack that B446 was a part of (7 individuals at that time) stayed on a hill over-looking a ranch within 547 yards of the ranch house from 4:34 a.m. to the following day at 4:09 a.m. Most of the close wolf-house proximate positions occurred during the nighttime hours. The presence of an occupied house, therefore, did not seem to deter wolf B446 from utilizing the local area.

Local residents reported that they often found wolf scat and tracks near dwellings, and wolf transit routes were identified crossing the highway and main valley within several hundred yards of farmsteads. This data from B446 implies that the presence of a dwelling alone will not necessarily prevent wolves from using an area.

Were close cow-wolf interactions (less than 109 yards or 100 meters) principally in riparian zones?

It has been suggested that increased wolf presence may create a “landscape of fear” inducing elk and other ungulate prey to decrease their use of riparian zones in favor of open upland habitats because approaching wolves are more easily detected. Theoretically, riparian zones near streams could be risky habitats for wild and domestic ungulates alike because these habitats typically contain tall shrubs that reduce visibility and offer ambush cover for predators. Furthermore, wolves with young often use grassy riparian meadows as rendezvous sites, thus concentrating wolf presence in this habitat type during summer months when cattle are commonly grazing there (Chigbrow 2016). Streams on this landscape are typically small (less than 5 ft. [1.5 m]) across, and similarly, riparian buffers on these streams are limited to less than 100 ft. (30 m) on either side of the stream.

We found that 2 of 53 (3.8%) close-range wolf-cow encounters (less than 109 yards separation) occurred within 100 ft. (30 m) of perennial or intermittent streams. These near-stream areas represented about 7.6% of the total home range area used by wolf B446. Thus, the frequency of encounters was lower than the percentage of this land class and does not indicate a preferred area of activity. Conversely, 66% of close-range encounters occurred in areas greater than 330 ft. (100 m) from streams, which represented about 75% of the wolf’s home range and a greater activity preference. In this wolf’s data set, there was no trend of increased wolf-cow encounters near streams, and it is interesting to note that this young-adult male wolf was neutral/negative in preference for near-stream habitats. The wolf did spend time traveling along ridgelines, often stopping on higher terrain with good viewsheds. Female wolves, especially those with pups, could behave differently on landscapes and have different spatiotemporal preferences as they search for prey. We look forward to more high frequency GPS data on wolves of both sexes and of varying age to further define this research question.

If cattle avoid riparian areas as wolf pressure increases, we should have observed movement of collared cattle away from riparian areas in years with higher wolf depredation. This was not seen when 2008 collared-cow data (high wolf presence) was compared to 2009 data (extremely high wolf presence). When one considers that most of the wolf-cattle close encounters occurred between 9:00 p.m. and 6 a.m., it seems more likely that areas where cattle bed are at higher risk for depredation. In general, bedding areas will reflect shared characteristics of good visibility, dry surface conditions, and deeper (rock-free bed area) soil. These attributes provide comfort, protection against insects, security (related to predation from bears, lions, and wolves), and favorable bedding.

Future Work

This study was designed to characterize the relationship between wolves and cows occupying the same landscapes. Our observations led to several interesting questions which, unfortunately, were beyond the scope of the current research project:

- 1) At what level did the presence of wolves stress calving heifers?
- 2) Did the stress persist throughout the day?
- 3) Could the increased stress lead to increased incidence of dystocia (calving difficulty), calf rejection, impaired cow/calf pairing, or diminished mothering activity?
- 4) Does this interaction result in long-term productivity issues?

As one might expect, collaring cattle is relatively easy, while collaring wolves is more challenging for a variety of reasons. Much remains to be learned about how wolves interact with cattle, and we will have ample

opportunity to observe these encounters in the future. We expect that a more complete picture will emerge as wildlife agencies collect more GPS data with shorter recording intervals. We encourage these agencies to make their data available to the broader scientific community so that experts in various disciplines can gain insight into wolf predation on both wild and domestic species.

We suggest that a more thorough examination of the effects of wolf predation on cattle biology, physiology, and behavior will help define the magnitude of this new stressor on animal health and performance. This information would generate practical management strategies to mitigate impacts. Veterinarians and other animal health care providers will be key players, and we suggest that information be shared between individuals.

Economic and labor ramifications of wolf presence on ranching enterprises need more work because management strategies on every ranch is to some extent unique to that ranch. We have observed that some individual herds tend to receive most of the depredation in an area, so the impact is concentrated instead of spread evenly across the ranching community. This can lead to specific ranches and ranch families shouldering heavy economic burdens that others do not face.

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Tables and Photo



Photo 1. A collar placed on a cow just after manufacturing
Photo by Patrick E. Clark, USDA/ARS

Table 1. The number of encounters between wolf B446 and the 10 collared mature cows during a 137-day period from June 23, 2009 to November 3, 2009.

Animal	547 yd (500 m)	273 yd (250 m)	109 yd (100 m)
Cow collar 03	73	24	3
Cow collar 05	121	43	5

Cow collar 08*	41	14	3
Cow collar 18	61	10	0
Cow collar 19	99	36	7
Cow collar 20	140	37	12
Cow collar 21	93	20	5
Cow collar 22*	23	4	1
Cow collar 23	52	15	2
Cow collar 24	80	41	15
Total	783	244	53

*Cows carrying collars 08 and 22 came home at the end of the grazing season without calves.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Williams.
I now recognize Mr. Hammill for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF JIM HAMMILL, PRESIDENT, IRON RANGE
CONSULTING & SERVICES INC., CRYSTAL FALLS, MICHIGAN**

Mr. HAMMILL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members.

I would like to share some thoughts about wolf recovery in Michigan. I am here today representing 50,000 members of the Safari Club International and the Safari Club Foundation, which is a 501(c)(3) organization that annually spends over \$4 million to promote science-based wildlife conservation worldwide, including that of threatened and endangered species.

By any measure, wolves in the Great Lakes states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have recovered. Numbers necessary for recovery of gray wolves, as described in both the Federal and the state recovery plans, have been met and exceeded in Michigan since 1994. When the Endangered Species Act was signed in 1973, few if any of us would have given wolf recovery in this region much of a chance to succeed. However, we were wrong.

Due to the legal protections provided by the Endangered Species Act and, most importantly, the will of the people of the Midwest, gray wolves have now occupied most of the range suitable for the species. I am here to speak about my experience with wolves in the upper peninsula of Michigan, an area of roughly 16,500 square miles.

In the most recent 10 years, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan midwinter wolf population has been documented to be between 620 and 700 animals. Today, as pups are born, that number is probably double. There are probably 1,400 wolves on the landscape at the upper peninsula as we sit here today.

Michigan wolves' primary diet is whitetail deer. Studies have indicated that deer represent roughly half of their annual food intake. The remainder of their diet is beavers, snowshoe hare, moose, and other small mammals. Wolves are opportunistic predators and normally will consume any food source available to them.

In Michigan, as in many other states, wolves exist in the proximity of agriculture. Livestock are often preyed upon. Currently, livestock producers in Michigan are compensated for losses that

can be verified. Ninety verified cattle depredation events have occurred in the last 10 years in Michigan. In our state, many of us believe wolves are also responsible for many unverified livestock disappearances.

Wolves are territorial predators with packs that vigorously defend a home range, an area that in Michigan is about 80 square miles per family group. Nearly all of Michigan's Upper Peninsula land base is now within the bounds of a defended wolf territory. Our current average pack size is about five animals. However, there are packs of wolves in Michigan that number 12, which is very large.

A special category of loss that we need to think about is wolf depredation and injuries to pets, particularly dogs. In Michigan, 111 dogs have been verified to have been killed by wolves and another 49 dogs have been injured by wolves. These numbers should be viewed as minimums, since many dogs in wolf range have disappeared and injuries are often not reported.

No owner compensation is offered for loss of dogs. As we all know, these animals are in so many ways family members. When pets are killed by wolves, wolves themselves and the people standing in the way of practical solutions to these depredations quickly gain new enemies from which there is no recovery.

The societal culture of the Upper Peninsula values whitetail deer highly. Our people are second- and third-generation descendants of Western European and Scandinavian immigrants. Our second homes typically are camps. They are used for outdoor pursuits but primarily for deer hunting.

The plummeting of deer numbers since the mid-1990s has negatively affected this important cultural value in the Upper Peninsula. Most of the blame for deer declines can be explained by habitat deficiencies; however, wolves are being singled out as the factor draining the wolf population. This has led to increasing non-support for wolves and an increase in illegal killing of wolves. Today, 60 percent of radio-collared wolves in Michigan die at the hands of man.

There is an aspect of our current situation that particularly concerns me. Since their re-establishment, wolves have not been subject to any regulated or widespread removals by man. As an apex predator, wolves typically exhibit fearlessness. Wolves have no natural enemies. Nothing kills wolves except man.

This has been a period of protection offered by the Endangered Species Act, and generally, in the absence of human persecution, I believe this has led to an increase in the number of bold wolf incidents, bold wolf incidents. I repeat that because I think it is very, very important, and that is close encounters between humans and wolves. Nothing good can come of these interactions. Eventually, if a person is injured, or worse, by wolves, all of the protections and values that wolves currently have will be lost.

The success story of recovery may be replaced by old prejudice and a public will to exterminate wolves. Remember, at one time in the past—

Mr. BENTZ. Mr. Hammill, I am going to have to ask you to wind down.

Mr. HAMMILL. Yes. At one time in the past, wolves were eradicated on this landscape by far fewer people than live here now. Our wolves in the Midwest are within one day's drive, one gas tank full in your car of 20 million people. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hammill follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES H. HAMMILL, PRESIDENT, IRON RANGE CONSULTING & SERVICES INC.

Mr. Chairman, Members, I'd like to share some thoughts about wolf recovery in Michigan. I'm here today representing 50,000 members of Safari Club International, and Safari Club Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization that annually spends over four million dollars to promote science-based wildlife conservation worldwide.

By any measure, wolves in the Great Lakes States of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have recovered.

Recovery of gray wolves as described by both federal and state recovery plans has been met and exceeded in Michigan since 1994.

When the Endangered Species Act was signed in 1973, few, if any of us, would have given wolf recovery in this region much of a chance to succeed. However, we were wrong. Due to the legal protections provided by the Endangered Species Act and the will of the people of the Midwest, gray wolves have now occupied most of the range suitable for the species. I'm here to speak about my experience with wolves in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, an area of roughly 16,500 square miles.

In the most recent 10 years, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan mid-winter wolf population has been documented to be 620–700 animals. This has been a leveling off of wolf numbers since its rapid increase from just three known animals in 1988. Each year with the birth of pups, this population easily doubles. However, because of high mortality, especially among pups, and natural mortality and dispersal of adults, the Michigan population returns to mid-winter numbers that have recently been recorded.

Michigan wolves' primary diet is whitetail deer. Studies have indicated deer represent roughly one-half of their annual food intake. The remainder of their diet is beaver, snowshoe hare, moose, and other small mammals. Wolves are opportunistic predators and normally will consume any food source available to them. In Michigan, as in many other states, wolves exist in the proximity to agriculture. Livestock are often preyed upon. Currently, livestock producers are compensated for losses that can be verified. Ninety verified cattle depredation events have occurred in the past 10 years in Michigan (2014–2023). In our state many of us believe wolves may also be responsible for some unverified livestock disappearance.

Wolves are territorial predators, with packs that vigorously defend a home range, an area that averages about 80 square miles in Michigan. Nearly all of Michigan's Upper Peninsula land base is now within the bounds of a defended territory. Our current average pack size is about five wolves. However, there are packs with as many as a dozen wolves in Michigan. Wolves are particularly sensitive to other canids within their territories. For example, coyotes that share territories with wolves are in constant danger.

A special category of loss due to wolf depredation is the killing and injuries of pets, particularly dogs. In Michigan, 111 dogs have been verified to have been killed by wolves and 49 dogs have been injured by wolves. These numbers should be viewed as minimums, since many dogs in wolf range have disappeared and injuries often are not reported. No owner compensation is offered for the loss of dogs. These animals are in so many ways "family members". When pets are killed by wolves, wolves themselves, and the people standing in the way of practical solutions to these depredations, quickly gain new enemies from which there is no recovery.

The societal culture of Michigan's Upper Peninsula values whitetail deer highly. Our people are second and third generation descendants of western European and Scandinavian immigrants. Our "second homes", typically, are camps, used for many outdoor pursuits, but primarily for deer hunting. The plummeting of deer numbers since the mid-1990s has negatively affected this important cultural value. Most of the blame for deer declines can be explained by habitat deficiencies. However, wolves are being singled out as "the" factor draining the deer population. This has led to increasing non-support for wolves and an increase in illegal killing of wolves. Today, 60% of radio collared wolves die at the hands of man.

There's an aspect of our current situation that particularly concerns me. Since their re-establishment, wolves have not been subject to any regulated and widespread removals by man. As an apex predator, wolves typically exhibit fearlessness. Wolves have no natural "enemies". Nothing kills wolves, except man. This has been a period of protection offered by the Endangered Species Act, and generally in absence of human persecution. I believe this has led to an increase in the number of bold wolf incidents; that is, close encounters between humans and wolves. Nothing good can come of these interactions. Eventually if a person is injured or worse by wolves, all of the protections and values that wolves bring to the Northwoods may be threatened. All of the efforts to re-establish wolves may be lost. The success story of recovery may be replaced by old prejudice and a public will to exterminate wolves.

To many people in Michigan, the promises of the Endangered Species Act have been broken, and a breach of trust has occurred. The legislation appears to be an effective listing mechanism, but a failure at de-listing. Recovery goals, long since exceeded, are inadequate to prevent litigation that keeps wolves listed and does not allow State's natural resources agencies to protect and manage wolves.

All state agencies are committed to sustainable wildlife management, including predators. It is ironic that the law intended to recover endangered wildlife (Endangered Species Act) is now setting the stage for the public to turn against this iconic species. The failure of Endangered Species Act to delist wolves is not because of a failure of the public to embrace wolves, or because of some negative aspect of the wolves themselves. This is a failure of clear intent of the legislation and the continued allowance of glaring misinterpretation of intent by the justice system.

I offer the following as a partial solution to the dilemma that we find ourselves in:

- The Endangered Species Act needs to be recrafted and "hardened" against language that has been successful at exploiting and reinterpreting original Legislative intent for the recovery of a species.
- The Endangered Species Act needs to more effectively address and provide flexibility in cases of dangerous human-wolf conflict (i.e., bold wolves). This conflict was not foreseen when the Act was initiated.
- State management of wildlife resources in North America has been a resounding success for nearly 100 years. As a wildlife biologist that has been involved in wolf recovery efforts, I believe that sustainability of the gray wolf population in all of the United States should be the authority of state wildlife agencies.
- Where current criteria have been met for delisting, management of wolves should immediately be a state function, subject to oversight by the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a determined period of time.

Thank you.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Hammill.

I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony.

I will now recognize Members for 5 minutes of questions each.

I recognize Mr. Stauber for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much.

Witnesses, thanks for your testimony. Greatly appreciated.

Representative Nelson, I want to begin by thanking you for the tour of your family's farm that you provided for me and my colleagues this morning, and for taking the time to share how the growing wolf population has affected you and your family as farmers and ranchers, in particular your wife's very heartfelt story this morning about the wolves near your children.

You and your family have been farming and raising cattle for quite some time now. Can you please talk about how you have dealt with the wolf over time, and were you facing the same challenges today that you were 20 years ago?

Mr. NELSON. Thank you, Congressman Stauber. And with the challenges of the wolves, it really has grown a little bit over the 20 years. The population has continued to increase some, and in recent estimates of the population by the state of Minnesota and the Fish and Wildlife, it has really showed a stable population of around 2,700 wolves. That is what the estimate is showing.

I do believe that number is probably higher, because the area of that estimate of the wolf population, it is not the entire state. And the goal is statewide. And in the recovery effort, the population has grown. So, over the last 20 to 25 years, we have had more wolf depredation issues. And, as one of the other witness says, oftentimes, we find one out of seven or one out of eight. Oftentimes, we have a calf missing, and a cow was looking for a baby, and it is not there.

And, just in the interest of time, we were on your farm today, and you had said there were Federal trappers just north of your farm, is that correct, right now?

Mr. NELSON. Yes. About 6 miles away, there is another ranch that they have been on. And this spring, to my knowledge, they have taken eight wolves off of this ranch. I think there were two calves and a cow that were killed there.

And basically, any direction you go from my farm, you can find this very similar story.

Mr. STAUBER. And would you agree that the population has grown more aggressive and more comfortable around cattle and humans?

Mr. NELSON. Yes, I would. I have stories. About 2 years ago, there was a neighbor that was riding her horse through the woods. Something startled the horse. She was bucked off, and the horse ran back to the ranch. She had to walk out of the woods herself. I believe she was 17 at the time, and there was a wolf trailing her the whole way back.

Fortunately, she was not harmed in that incident. She was a little bit hurt from getting bucked off the horse, but we are seeing more and more stories. We are hearing more and more of this, wolves coming right up to and through the yards into homes. I have had them come between my barn and my house.

Mr. STAUBER. And your wife testified this morning that when your children were younger, the wolf tracks were right up to your back deck.

Thank you very much.

In my time remaining, Mr. Hammill, can you speak a little bit about how the ESA is supposed to work? And what is supposed to happen once a listed species recovers?

Mr. HAMMILL. Once numerical population goals have been met according to the Endangered Species Act, the animal should qualify for removal from the list. Unfortunately, very few animals are ever removed. The Endangered Species Act is an excellent vehicle for listing species, but it has serious defects for delisting species. And the holes in that Act are often depredated upon by those people who want to keep species in the Act.

Mr. STAUBER. And my last question. What would you say is the main reason why the ESA isn't being carried out the proper way?

Mr. HAMMILL. Because I think the Act itself, the wording of the Act itself is subject to too much interpretation, and that has, of course, been successful at judicial levels to keep animals from being delisted. It is unfortunate.

Mr. STAUBER. In my last 15 seconds, I have hunted my entire life 45 minutes north of Duluth. My father has been there. He is 91. Last November was his 60th straight year at the firearms deer opener. Tonight and every night we could go to the back deck of the hunting shack and howl, and the wolves would howl back.

Just this past week, my brother and my father were heading into the shack road, and just a couple hundred yards away, my 91-year-old father says to my brother, "Jamie, look at the deer." He said, "Dad, that is a wolf."

They are around today. There are Federal trappers just north of the city of Duluth.

And I yield back.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you.

Before we go to the next witness, the police have notified us that there are three cars blocking their ability to move their police cars, so to avoid getting towed, or worse, whoever has a Toyota RAV4 with a license plate 296, don't know that for sure. If you have a Toyota RAV4, go move it. If you have a gray Ram Pickup, please move it. If you have a gray 4-door CRV, please move it, or the police will move it for you, and that would be very sad.

Let's now move to Ms. Hageman for 5 minutes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

We have heard from our Democrat colleagues in Washington that states will hunt wolves to extinction if they are delisted. We know from experience in my home state of Wyoming, however, that that is not the case, as the wolves have been delisted since 2017, and we have maintained and protected a healthy population while at the same time they are subject to a regulated hunt. And, in the vast majority of my state, they are actually designated as predators, meaning that they can be shot at any time.

Dr. Roberts, given your experience as a wildlife manager, do you believe that states in the Great Lakes region would be just as successful in managing the wolves post-delisting?

Dr. ROBERTS. Absolutely. I believe they have the competency to be able to manage wolves and to do so in a sustainable way. I think it is likely that they would manage for less wolves or some states may opt for that, but I am certain that they will be able to manage to retain some wolves on their landscape.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, I spent quite a bit of time in preparing for this hearing today reviewing your Minnesota Wolf Management Plan, dated 2023 to 2032, put out by the Department of Natural Resources. And if you go to page 9, it actually states that although this plan was developed in response to Federal action, the 2001 plan, which was the predecessor to this, has guided wolf management through multiple ESA listing and delisting decisions.

In other words, it is the state of Minnesota that manages wolves right now, and I think a lot of people don't realize that it is the states that are primarily responsible for managing our wildlife.

In reviewing this plan, one of the things that shocked me was that I learned that the Federal Government, the Fish and Wildlife

Services' recovery goals for the wolf in Minnesota was 1,200 to 1,400 wolves by 2001. But current estimates of the population show that there are more than double that number in the state of Minnesota. And, as has been testified today, it is probably much higher than that.

And that number has stabilized over the last several decades. In other words, the wolf population in Minnesota is stabilized.

So, as I have read this plan, I think one of the things that struck me, especially in light of the fact that this and its predecessor are how wolves are managed in Minnesota, I kind of see why there is the problem. And I think that the problem stems from the way that wolves are viewed.

One of the things that struck me is that there is an awful lot of discussion in this report or this plan about how we are going to incorporate diverse views. We are going to make sure that everybody has a seat at the table. We are going to make sure that we are doing an awful lot of talking.

We care a lot about diverse human values, and we talk a lot about diversity in here, but the things that I don't see is there is very little data. There is very little science. There is very little metrics by which we can determine whether wolf management is actually being effective or not.

There is almost no discussion whatsoever as to the impact on our other wildlife, on livestock. I turn to page 8 of this report, and it says, "This is the vision for wolves, and this is how we are going to determine wolf conservation." It says they are going to look at the best available ecological, social, and cultural knowledge to inform wolf conservation.

I don't know. I would like science. I would like data. I would like to know about resilience. I would like to know the numbers. I would like to know the history of wolf recovery and management. I would like to know how they are balancing the wildlife needs and protecting the prey and making sure that we are also protecting our livestock industry.

There is an awful lot of information in here, but actually, there is not a lot of information in here. I wouldn't even call this a wolf management plan. I would call it we are going to protect wolves at the cost and expense of everything else plan. And everybody in Minnesota is suffering as a result of this.

And even when they talk about the attitudes, they will talk about the impact on the hunters and on livestock, but then they really focus on what everybody else wants, and that everybody else are typically the people who are not directly impacted by the decisions that are made.

Mr. Nelson, I would like to go to you. You have given us some good information today about the impact that this has had on you and your other farmers and ranchers.

Coming from Wyoming, again, I grew up on a ranch. I know what it is like to want to protect our livestock. I know what it is like pulling a calf at 2 o'clock in the morning and the effort and work that goes into putting together a breeding program.

And what is so frustrating to me is when people say that that is essentially a cost of having this kind of an apex predator in your state, and it really shouldn't be because part of wildlife manage-

ment needs to be a balance. We have to balance everything. We know we have a stable population, and we need to move forward with delisting.

But can you elaborate on some of the helpful tools that would be available to you if the wolves were delisted in Minnesota?

Mr. NELSON. Thank you for that question.

Right now, there is nothing we can do unless a wolf is attacking a human. So, either myself or my family, that is the only thing that can happen.

And right now the wolves are getting more and more brazen, and I believe there needs to be a healthy fear. And I think that needs to come both from humans and from wolves and right now that doesn't exist.

I think it can be there, and we can maintain populations and maintain goals and, at the same time, be able to put a respect on both ways. I don't think there is a respect from either species, for each other right now.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I yield back.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Tiffany for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I want to congratulate the Vikings on drafting a quarterback here in the last couple weeks. We do that every 15 years over in Wisconsin.

Mr. STAUBER. Next, next.

Mr. TIFFANY. It is very disappointing that Commissioner Strommen is not here today. We see the same thing over in Wisconsin where the leadership of our wildlife agencies are not showing up for these hearings to listen to the people who truly are sportsmen in our states.

Before I get into the questions at hand here, I do want to ask Dr. Roberts, you work at a university. We have seen what is going on around the country at various universities that are grabbing headlines these days. What is happening at your university?

Dr. ROBERTS. Thank you for asking, Congressman.

Israel is in our minds and in our prayers at College of the Ozarks. We recently hosted a convocation on the plight of Israel for our students and for our community.

Our board of trustees recently passed unanimously a resolution in support of Israel and, most importantly, calling for continued prayer for the nation of Israel and her citizens.

Mr. TIFFANY. Dr. Roberts, is it correct in your background, you have worked for the Federal Government? Is that correct?

Dr. ROBERTS. Yes, sir, I have.

Mr. TIFFANY. And is it correct that you worked in Alaska for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Dr. ROBERTS. Yes. I worked in Alaska for the National Wildlife Refuge system for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mr. TIFFANY. And, Dr. Roberts, haven't you worked in the state of Wisconsin on wildlife issues also?

Dr. ROBERTS. Yes, I did.

Mr. TIFFANY. And now you are teaching down at the College of the Ozarks. Is that accurate?

Dr. ROBERTS. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Talk a little bit about the information you gave us in a hearing in regards to you can go up to 29 percent of take and still not endanger a species. I think that is at the core of what we are discussing here. To make sure that we are making a sound, scientific decision in passing a bill like we did this week.

Could you elaborate a little bit more about that?

Dr. ROBERTS. Sure. For most species, there is a surplus that can be taken in a sustainable way. And, for wolves, like many other species, we have a good idea of what that is. There are published studies that can help guide that. There are published studies that indicate that somewhere around 30 percent of the population could be taken in a sustainable way.

In other words, you could remove 30 percent of the population one year, and next year have just as many animals.

Mr. TIFFANY. Also, I think it was 26 wildlife biologists a decade ago when we had delisting. I was in the State Legislature at the time in Wisconsin, and they wrote in their letter, and I don't know if you were a signatory to that letter, but there were 26 wildlife biologists that said you are going to endanger the Endangered Species Act if you do not allow a delisting to happen when a species should be delisted.

Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

Dr. ROBERTS. Absolutely. The Endangered Species Act has the potential to tie the hands of agencies and limit what tools that they can use. And that might be appropriate on a short-term to provide some limited protection, but when animals are listed indefinitely, despite ample evidence to suggest that they should not be on the list, I believe that agencies and jurisdictions are going to be very hesitant to want to engage in endangered species management in the future. They don't want another wolf situation.

So, if there are species that are truly imperiled, I believe that legislatures and agencies are going to be hesitant to do that because they don't want another wolf situation.

Mr. TIFFANY. And is it the case that we actually have some species that numbers may be suffering, when we are wasting time with like the Fish and Wildlife Service on a species that should be delisted, they could be putting it towards other more worthy efforts? Is that accurate?

Dr. ROBERTS. Yes, absolutely. I just saw that the Service is spending in excess of I believe it is \$3 million to develop a recovery plan for a species that is recovered. I would argue that that money could be better spent on species that need to be recovered and not species that are recovered.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would just say I have the statement of administration policy that the Biden administration put out. We call it the veto message that they put out in regards to this bill. They have backtracked on veto messages in the past over this session of Congress.

I would urge you to contact your United States Senators here in the upper Great Lakes, here at a critical time in 2024, and make this a prominent issue for all of them.

It is us that sets the policy. Let's see if they are willing to stand up for their states, or are they going to stand up for the Biden

administration. They have a choice. Do they stand up for Minnesota, for Wisconsin, for Michigan, or do they stand with the Biden administration? They should make that choice this year, and you should help them be able to make that choice.

I am going to close with this. This is intentional in regards to rural America. As my colleague, Representative Hageman, has said a few times on the Floor of both Committee rooms and the House of Representatives, this is a war on rural America, and you should understand it as such. That is what is going on here. And you need to protect your livelihoods at this point from an administration that is at war with you.

I yield back.

Mr. BENTZ. So, at considerable risk to maintaining control of this hearing, I am going to recognize Mr. Stauber for 30 seconds.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your indulgence.

Representative Tiffany, in December 2023, I happened to be in your great state of Wisconsin, and I had the evening off. Could you tell me where in Wisconsin your National Hockey League team is located?

I yield back.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank goodness.

All right. I recognize Ms. Fischbach for 5 minutes.

Ms. FISCHBACH. How do I follow that?

No, sincerely, though, I want to thank the Chair for allowing me to participate today because I am not actually on the Committee, so I appreciate being waived on for today.

And I do want to thank Representative Stauber and Representative Hageman for your work on this because you are diligently and hard at work in trying to solve this issue because it is a huge issue.

And, Representative Nelson, thank you for the tour this morning. We really appreciate it. And I know that Mr. Stauber had mentioned it. If you want to expand at all about what your wife said this morning because it was so meaningful.

Because we have been out in the field, and we have seen the tracks. But I think that what she said, because I feel like the story of the gray wolf is really the story of the failure of the Federal Government. And who pays the price are the ranchers, the farmers, and the families.

So, if you have anything you want to add that she had said this morning, it was pretty incredible.

Mr. NELSON. Thank you, Congresswoman Fischbach. I can't repeat it the same way and give it the same emphasis that she can. I think only a mother can do that.

But, as a dad, as a father, the concern for our children and family, I mean, our children are the greatest gift we have, and to be able to protect them and raise them in this great nation is a wonderful experience.

And it is amazing to hear the wolves howl at night, but it is another thing when those same tracks, when you see their tracks, where they were and where they have been, and realize that we are fortunate that we are not a statistic.

We continue to hear that, while there has not been a wolf attack on humans or, if they do, it ends up being a nuance, well, it is only in this situation or that.

My wife had asked one of our Senators one time when we were out in Washington, DC, with the Minnesota Farm Bureau. She said, why does my child have to be the first one? Fortunately, we have never had that situation, but why would we need to be the first one before an action is taken?

And this is an opportunity that we can lead on this and be able to take management of it. And, again, I bring back that we can have respect between both species. Wolves can respect humans. Humans can respect wolves. That can happen both ways, and I think, with a proper plan, that does happen.

And I thank you for the question.

Ms. FISCHBACH. Thank you very much.

I will just add what really was meaningful, she talked about the kids out in the front yard. And you had mentioned that you had tracks just between the house and the barn, which is not very far.

So, I just thought it was very meaningful because it is not just about the livestock. It is about safety, children's safety when the kids are little.

But I did want to just ask, Representative Nelson, we did talk a little bit about compensation this morning, and you also talked about how Minnesota has moved some of those funds, and they certainly don't have enough in that.

So, maybe just talking a little bit, because I have heard it from some of the folks in my area about how it is just darn near impossible to even qualify for it because you have to have it.

So, just maybe a little bit about what the state is doing on there and what is going on with the money there.

Mr. NELSON. Thank you for the question.

And the wolf depredation fund and then the elk damage fund, they are separate pots, but they are the same.

And up in the northwest corner of the state, there are elk that are feeding on the hay bales. They are destroying fences, and there is an effort to rebuild the population to expand that.

And the elk damage is a little easier to see. You can see when they have come into the hay yard and eaten hay. There is evidence left behind of that.

With the wolves, that is a little bit harder to always quantify when you are missing something. You have to have proof of that, and that could be a challenge to prove.

But, at the same time our funds there usually are not enough. I think, right now, the claims payable in 2024 are \$148,000, and I believe there are \$175,000 in that count total. We have a long ways left of 2024.

Ms. FISCHBACH. Yes, and just how difficult it is to prove that.

And I will just say I really appreciate the experts because they know what is going on. But in the end, I am not an expert, but I don't need to be an expert to know that this has to be dealt with, that we are in real trouble here, and we need to deal with this.

I appreciate everyone being here today, and we will continue the fight. Mr. Tiffany mentioned rural Minnesota, rural areas, rural America, but it is about making sure that farmers, ranchers, and

families can continue to do their work and not be afraid every day of the gray wolves.

So, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your indulgence.

Mr. BENTZ. I now recognize Ms. Maloy for 5 minutes.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for letting me be here and be part of this.

I just want to take a second at the beginning to thank everybody who is sitting behind that table for being here.

Just very quickly, I used to think Congress was a really distant and unresponsive entity and mostly useless. Now I am part of it. But the tipping point for me was a field hearing of the House Natural Resources Committee in southern Utah, and I saw them show up and listen to people just like you and me talking about Bureau of Land Management issues in Utah. And I thought this is how representative government is supposed to work.

So, I am really excited that you are all here, that you are participating, that you are seeing your government show up and respond to your needs. And I am excited to be on this side of the table now, being part of that, because it is what we are supposed to do.

I like that everybody keeps talking about the fact that the recovery of the wolf should be celebrated, and I want to take some of my time and just make sure we are all understanding why the recovery of the wolf is not being celebrated. We have talked about the science. We have talked about the politics. I want to make sure we put a nice bow on that for everybody who is here, who was willing to show up and participate and is listening.

It is unfortunate, but we have seen time and time again that it is the nature of the Federal Government not to want to give up control. So, when we give the Federal Government temporary control over something, it never ends up being temporary. And the Endangered Species Act is a really good example of this.

We have the numbers. We have experts who have sat here and talked to us about the numbers. We know that the wolf is thriving. You all know that there are wolves here. You live here. You hear them. You have seen the impacts.

What we are working on here isn't actually recovery of the species anymore. It is who gets to make the decisions.

The Federal Government doesn't relinquish control easily, and even in this case, they have tried several times to relinquish control. And then a group comes in that would be irrelevant if the wolves get delisted, and they sue, and a court says the Federal Government has to keep managing wolves.

So, I think everybody here has agreed that we have the numbers. Everyone has agreed that we have met the criteria. The only thing we are still disagreeing about is who gets to make these decisions.

And, unfortunately, it is a well-established pattern that, when the Federal Government is managing a resource, be it wolves or land or minerals, local voices get drowned out.

One of the reasons it is so important that you all are here today is that local voices are being heard. I think the locals should be helping make these decisions, and that is why having states manage the species is so important. That is why delisting is so important.

So, I have taken up most of my own time now, which used to drive me crazy with Members of Congress, but I do have some questions.

Representative Nelson, I was going to ask you about what your wife said this morning, but now you have been asked that several times.

But you have talked about mutual respect between humans and wolves. I think we have the same problem right now between the Federal Government and the State Government. There is just not that level of mutual respect where the Federal Government is acknowledging that the states can manage these species.

And you represent the state. Would you just like to speak to that really quickly?

Mr. NELSON. Thank you. And I have long believed that local control is best. And, yes, we do need to have a structure and a framework, but I think local control is really the best because it is the people that live and breathe and live in an area that really know what is best.

Now, there may be some guidelines that they need to follow, but I think whether it is our townships, our counties, our states, I think there is always a tendency for the next level up to be the ones that really want to control and really have the authority.

And really what is happening is the boots on the ground. The control of what is happening, the management is largely done through state agencies and local biologists and things like that while the control of the issue is generally out of DC. And that is a problem that we see.

There can be a structure, but yet I think much more of the decisions really need to be lower down the ladder.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you.

Mr. Williams, you are here from Oregon, a very different state, very far away. Are you confident that the state of Oregon could manage wolves in Oregon without the Federal Government telling them how to do it?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yes. The eastern corridor is managed by Oregon now, and the wolves are expanding way too fast, and it is completely delisted in our part of the state.

Ms. MALOY. OK.

I am down to 20 seconds, so Dr. Roberts, Mr. Hammill, just quickly. Are you confident that the states could manage this better than the Federal Government is doing?

Dr. ROBERTS. Absolutely.

Mr. HAMMILL. Oh, definitely.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you.

I recognize myself for 5 minutes, and I thank the witnesses for being here.

The question that I am going to ask Representative Nelson first is, the hearing is labeled, "How many wolves are enough," and, more to the point, who should decide. And the issue at the ESA level would be the number of wolves necessary to keep wolves going as a species. That would be a much smaller number than you have here.

You have a much larger, 5,000 wolves. Who is supposed to make the decision about who should have how many wolves? What is that standard that we are looking for?

I heard you on the farm say you are seeking some sort of a balance so that you don't see your deer population plummet. Obviously, too many wolves. But how one adjusts it and who makes that decision is of great interest to me, to all of us.

Is it your thought that this is one of those things where you get around the table with a bunch of folks that think otherwise and sort it out that way? Or is there some better way of establishing that standard?

Mr. NELSON. Thank you for that question, Mr. Chair.

I think really the best way to make decisions is looking at science. And, as Congresswoman Hageman said, in the plan, there really appears to be a lack of science on our decision making and that is concerning.

I am a fan of having diversity in our wildlife. It is important. Yet, we need to have science. We need to follow the science. How many times have we heard in the last 4 years, to follow the science? Yet, unfortunately, we are not seeing that in our plans that are coming forward.

We are seeing species recover, but yet, we are not following the science. To get it started, we are but then we are not following through.

Mr. BENTZ. Dr. Roberts, once you get to 5,000 wolves, how in the world do you reduce the number? I know there are 60,000 plus wolves in Canada, so they say, and that they are allowed to be hunted in all but 2 percent of Canada. Yet, they are not, at this point, able to slow down the increase in the number of wolves.

So, if you have 5,000 wolves in this state, what are you going to do? This is not like eastern Oregon where I grew up on a ranch where you could see for miles, nothing, sagebrush. Here you can see 100 feet.

How do you get rid of these wolves? And assuming politically it is acceptable, how do you do it?

Dr. ROBERTS. Well, in reducing a population, I like to imagine landing a plane. You could take a plane from a high altitude and bring it down to land. You could do that very steeply, or you can gradually reduce the population.

And the way to do either is going to be through hunting programs, through state management, through hunting programs. So, states would use monitoring data. They would set quotas and regulations to achieve those management goals, which would likely be removing a significant number of animals.

Mr. BENTZ. I hate to keep hopping around, but the time is short.

Mr. Williams, there was a suggestion by one of my Democrat colleagues, actually the Ranking Member on the Floor of the House 3 days ago that a wolf is hardly different than a pet. I actually stood up and said, "You, obviously, don't know the difference between a wolf and schnauzer." He gave me a chance to use the word "schnauzer" on the Floor of the House. The point, though, is they seem to think that way.

That is not true, is it, Mr. Williams? Tell us about it. You can avoid too many graphic details, but is a wolf the same when it comes to killing animals as your household pet?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Absolutely not. A wolf is somewhere around 100 pounds. The wolves that we are dealing with, they kill. That is what they do. They are very good at it. They do not kill their animals and then eat them. They just start eating them, and they keep eating them until they get to something vital and then the animal dies. It is among the most horrific deaths you can have.

They also pack hunt, or they individually hunt. So, if an individual gets beaten by a cow, he will bring a friend back, and they will win eventually.

They also traumatize those animals that they leave alive, the rest of the herd. And the production losses in those kinds of situations, those kinds of families is extreme.

And I could go on, but in no way is a 110-pound wolf that is a born killer anything close to a pet.

Mr. BENTZ. Yes, I think the phrase I was using was "natural born killer." And people can make fun of that, but it is the truth.

We are out of time now, and I want to say to everybody here, thank you so much for being here.

And also I have learned, as all of us have up here, that these hearings are only as good as our ability to get them out to the rest of the nation. So, if you want to share what we did today, then go to naturalresources.house.gov. Look under hearings, and you will find the video of this hearing.

Share it so that the type of testimony that we heard today, although it was wonderful for those of us who are present, it would be more wonderful if a couple million people actually heard about it. So, please share it.

I want to thank everybody again for being here. I thank the witnesses for their testimony and the Members for their questions. The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to these in writing.

Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, May 8. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for those responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:50 a.m., Central Time, the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submission for the Record by Rep. Bentz**STATE OF OREGON**

Committee on Natural Resources
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Federal Delisting of Grey Wolves

We are writing to express our support for the delisting of the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) in America, echoing sentiments shared by many who have witnessed the remarkable recovery of this iconic species since its initial listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973.

Since the enactment of the ESA, wolves have experienced a remarkable resurgence, expanding exponentially in numbers and range across the United States. This resurgence is a testament to the effectiveness of the ESA in providing crucial protections and fostering the recovery of imperiled species. The successful reintroduction of an experimental population into Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho in the mid-1990s marked a turning point, leading to a resurgence that has seen wolves reclaim territory in adjoining states and even establish stable populations in Oregon and Washington. The wolf populations in California and Nevada have also been dispersing.

The states empowered by the ESA and guided by their respective wolf management plans, have played a pivotal role in safeguarding and managing wolf populations. Oregon and Washington have demonstrated exemplary commitment to wolf conservation and management, despite three-fourths of their states being under ESA jurisdiction. Both states have implemented robust management and protection measures, leading to the stabilization of wolf populations, and prompting efforts to delist wolves as endangered species.

On November 9th, 2015, Oregon voted to the delist wolves in Oregon thus marking a significant milestone in recognizing the success of state-led conservation efforts. Subsequent legislative actions regarding that decision were made and was affirmed by the Oregon State Legislature and Oregon State Governor in HB 4040 (2016) which underscored the commitment of the state to assume greater responsibility for the management and protection of wolves.

It is evident that the ESA has fulfilled its mandate in facilitating the recovery of the grey wolf, paving the way for successful state-led conservation efforts. Now with stable wolf populations and comprehensive management plans in place, it is time to transition authority and responsibility for wolf management solely to the states. By delisting the grey wolf we can acknowledge the achievements of both the ESA and state conservation efforts while ensuring the continued conservation and sustainable management of this iconic species.

Considering these developments, I urge you to consider the overwhelming evidence supporting the delisting of the grey wolf and to prioritize the transfer of authority to state agencies for the management and protection of this species. We must recognize the recovery of the grey wolf population in the lower 48 otherwise Federal ESA recovery loses its legitimacy.

Respectfully,

Bobby Levy
 House District 58

Bill Hansell
 Senate District 29

David Brock Smith
 Senate District 1

Lynn Findley
 Senate District 30

Tim Knopp
 Senate District 27

Boomer Wright
 House District 9

Court Boice
 House District 1

Jeff Helfrich
 House District 52

Mark Owens
House District 60

Cyrus Javadi
House District 32

Emily McIntire
House District 56

Anna Scharf
House District 23

E. Werner Reschke
House District 55

Christina Witham
Baker County Commissioner

Bruce Nichols
Baker County Commissioner

Todd Nash
Wallowa County Commissioner

Susan Roberts
Wallowa County Commissioner

John Hillock
Wallowa County Commissioner

Paul Anderes
Union County Commissioner

Matt Scarfo
Union County Commissioner

Donna Beverage
Union County Commissioner

Roy Drago Jr.
Morrow County Commissioner

Rick Lewis
House District 18

Christine Goodwin
House District 4

Virgle Osborne
House District 2

Ed Diehl
House District 17

Dwayne Yunker
House District 3

Vicki Breese-Iverson
House District 5

Shane Alderson
Baker County Commissioner

Dan Dorran
Umatilla County Commissioner

John Shafer
Umatilla County Commissioner

Cindy Timmons
Umatilla County Commissioner

Derrick DeGroot
Klamath County Commissioner

Patti Adair
Deschutes County Commissioner

John Rowell
Grant County Commissioner

May 3, 2024

Representative Cliff Bentz
 2nd District, Oregon
 Chairman
 Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Bentz:

The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Farm Bureaus, collectively representing over 290,000 members, want to thank the House Committee on Natural Resources subcommittee for holding a field hearing on wolf populations. The three states are home to an estimated 4,200 wolves and request federal delisting of the Great Lakes Wolf and returning management to the states.

The Great Lakes wolf should be the definitive conservation success story. After federal protections were established, the wolf population in Minnesota began to increase and expand its range. Recently, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wolf Population Update conducted in 2023 estimated that the 2022–2023 mid-winter wolf population was 2,919 wolves. In the mid to late 1970s, this expansion led to wolves naturally recolonizing northwest Wisconsin and the first breeding pack was confirmed in Douglas County in 1978.

While initial population growth was slow, by the mid-1990s, Wisconsin's wolf population began to increase and expand steadily. Wolves in the Western Great Lakes region surpassed federal recovery goals in the winter of 1999–2000, when Wisconsin and Michigan had a combined total of 100 wolves for five consecutive years, and the population in Minnesota continued to grow. This growth has now expanded past the minimum levels determined for a healthy wolf population, and in particular in Minnesota, where a healthy population is determined to be at 1,600 wolves statewide. Michigan's population has also surpassed the initial goal of 200 animals for five consecutive years as initially outlined in the state's management plan. Surveying from 2022 reported a minimum estimated population of 631 wolves, with the highest densities in the Western Upper Peninsula.

Wolves in each state would not have been able to thrive if it weren't for the support of the residents and farmers in each state. A survey by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources found that over 60% of those living in wolf habitat support wolf populations on the landscape but also support state management.

Unfortunately, wolf management has become a difficult situation because of judicial rulings that often take place thousands of miles from the affected landscape. The end result has left farmers unable to protect their herds beyond installing non-lethal conflict mitigation measures that merely push the problem wolves to the next farm down the road. This leaves farmers feeling helpless to protect their livelihood and less likely to support the continuation of predators on the landscape and non-lethal mitigation efforts.

The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Farm Bureaus support returning wolf management to the states. It's time to celebrate wolves for the conservation success story they are and end the judicial back and forth. Each state has proven the ability to appropriately manage wolves and we hope Congress will finally act to ensure farmers can defend their herds.

Sincerely,

Brad Olson, President
 Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

Dan Glessing, President
 Minnesota Farm Bureau

Carl Bednarski, President
 Michigan Farm Bureau

