



State of Washington  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Washington State Governor  
Post Office Box 40009  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

I am writing regarding our earlier communications (enclosed) about wolf-livestock conflict in the Kettle River Range in northeastern Washington. I would like to provide an update on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) strategies for reducing the loss of wolves and livestock in the area.

Since my last communication on December 1, 2019, the Department has met four times with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to consider potential changes to allotment management that would benefit wolves, livestock, and people. These meetings included both local staff from the Colville National Forest as well as regional staff based in Portland. The discussions at these meetings ranged from the importance of range riding and how allotment planning can facilitate range riding duties, to alternate or transitional grazing allotments, to assistance for collecting cattle at the end of the grazing season. Based on these meetings and our dialogue, the USFS continues to be supportive of the Department's recommendations to use range riders on grazing allotments in the Kettle Range. They are also supportive of allotment planning that is beneficial to the producer, cattle, and wolves, but indicated that substantive allotment changes would require National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and are unrealistic for the 2020 grazing season.

USFS staff have also become regular attendees at Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) meetings and their attendance has allowed them to provide updates and insight about grazing on USFS lands. The continued presence of USFS staff at WAG meetings has provided new and welcome voices of collaborative land managers into the room to help both the Department and WAG members understand the current policy and management of federal public grazing allotments.

The Department has continued an expedited meeting schedule with the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG). Since last grazing season, the WAG has convened five times (Nov. 20-21, 2019; Jan. 8-9, 2020; Mar. 31-Apr. 1, 2020; Apr. 30, 2020, and May 18-19, 2020). We very much appreciate JT Austin's visit to WAG on Jan. 8, and her dialogue and guidance with WAG members and Department staff.

The focus of the past five meetings for both the Department and the WAG has been on improvements to the wolf-livestock interaction protocol, which provides guidance for decision making. COVID-19 has undoubtedly hindered the WAG process, which is built on collaboration by fostering relationships and reconciliation. Under normal circumstances, the content is challenging, but working through these difficult issues virtually exacerbates that challenge. That said, Department staff and WAG members have focused their efforts on trying to improve the efficacy of non-lethal tools, and clarity on roles and responsibilities of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff and livestock producers.

At this time, the WAG has not finalized their recommendation to the Director on a revised protocol. One of the areas of the protocol on which they have spent considerable time is improving the expectations for range riding duties and accountability. Following the expert guidance of our staff and the dialogue with the WAG, once livestock are turned out for summer on the Colville National Forest within the Kettle River Range, range riding is the tool best-suited for reducing the likelihood of wolf depredations in allotments with dispersed grazing. For your convenience, I have enclosed the draft range rider duties section generated through the WAG process. Although it is not final and there may be additional edits, it will provide you with an idea about the expectations and intensity of this important non-lethal tool. I would consider the thoughtful, stakeholder-based development of the expectations for this nonlethal tool a major step forward in the Department's renewed focus on proactive, nonlethal tools compared to years prior.

In addition to addressing the expectations for range riding in the WAG process, the following are strategies that are either new to Washington this year (different from years prior) or are improvements to increase the efficacy of non-lethal tools.

1. Increased range riding capacity. Range rider services are now available to producers through three different entities: The Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative (NEWWCC) and the Cattle Producers of Washington (CPOW). Livestock producers can use Department-contracted range riders, and we are currently recruiting to increase the number of range riders from last year. This summer, the Department has \$250,000 dollars allocated to range riding services statewide.

The Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative (NEWWCC) received \$320,000 from the general-fund for use of range riders, specifically in the Kettle River Range. In addition, Cattle Producers of Washington (CPOW) received nearly \$150,000 in general-fund dollars from a Washington Department of Agriculture grant. CPOW has indicated they are using a portion of that funding for range riders for a producer in the Kettle River Range.

It is worth noting that having a diversity of range riding services available, including those locally owned and operated, is an important component of our long-term solution. Range riding is not "one size fits all." Livestock producers have different needs and varying levels of trust in the entities involved. To be successfully implemented, producers need to have trust in the people working with their cattle, which are their

personal property and livelihood. Supporting local range riding entities is critical. Additionally, the Department is likely not the appropriate entity for providing livestock husbandry services in the long term.

I believe this increased capacity and variety of range riding options is critically important in the Kettle River Range area. It will allow for more complete and consistent coverage by rotating range riders and reducing the time gaps when range riders are not present on the landscape. It will also allow livestock producers and WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialists to increase the intensity of range riding during periods of time when the risk of conflict is especially high.

2. Increased accountability of range rider activities. Range riding typically occurs in an allotment type setting that is remote, rugged, and often heavily timbered. As such, it creates challenges for understanding the geographic area covered, the intensity, and the potential for addressing gaps and emergent needs. All Department range riders are carrying a handheld GPS and/or satellite communication device (i.e., Garmin inReach), allowing them to document their findings and location, and communicate in real time with producers and local WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialists. It is our understanding that NEWWCC and CPOW range riders are also documenting findings and locations with similar geo-referencing devices (e.g., handheld GPS, georeferenced photos, or Garmin inReach). In addition, all three range riding entities are documenting their range riding activities in a daily log. We are working with NEWWCC and CPOW on the content needs of those logs for consistency and decision making.
3. New or expanded non-lethal deterrent pilot projects. Northeastern Washington community members and WDFW Wildlife Conflict Specialists have worked together on ideas for additional non-lethal deterrents. The focus was identifying new tools not yet widely deployed or used and implement them in areas with chronic depredations in northeast Washington. The ad hoc group came up with several ideas focused on aiding range riders in their duties, assisting livestock producers with their cattle, and/or aiding WDFW's efficiency with assisting both entities (see enclosure). Each of the pilot projects are in different stages of development. The Department provided funding for some of these pilot projects during the 2020 grazing season.

The Department has discussed implementation of proactive non-lethal deterrents with each livestock producer who has cattle on a USFS allotment within a wolf pack territory with a history of chronic depredation. The use of proactive non-lethal deterrents is tailored to the producer's specific operation and takes into consideration factors such as the type and number of livestock, characteristics of the grazing area, and the history of wolf-livestock conflict. In addition to documenting the proactive deterrent measures in place, Department staff also maintain records detailing communications with the producer, any additions or modifications to non-lethal tools, and depredation events.

As much as I would like to assure you that these tools will prevent wolf depredations on livestock, unfortunately I cannot. In areas where wolves and livestock overlap, there will always be a potential for conflict, and each conflict will come with its own unique set of facts and

challenges. However, I believe strongly that as a collective (livestock producers, local communities, the WAG, county governments, the Forest Service, the Department, etc.) we have the best-suited strategies and tools in place to reduce the likelihood of wolf depredation on livestock. If a pattern of wolf depredation does occur, and each member in the “collective we” has done their individual part to use non-lethal tools as our first line of defense, then lethal removal warrants my consideration as another tool to address repeated wolf depredations on livestock.

I am also not in a position to force or regulate livestock husbandry practices, especially because many involve direct interaction with the livestock producer’s personal property—their livestock. They also involve federal land management and laws over which the state does not have authority. I do not believe forcing compliance leads to success. Our landscape is now shared by wolves and livestock, and our wolf plan supports coexistence, with a sustainable wolf population and strong economic vitality of the local livestock community. It will take our diverse communities working together in a collaborative process, rather than force, to achieve that future.

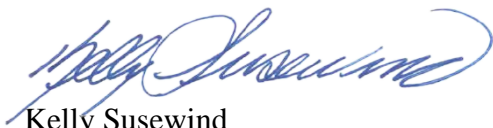
There have been and will likely continue to be situations where not all the expectations for non-lethal deterrents are met. Our current protocol provides guidance on that situation and states, “If proactive deterrence measures are not in place a sufficient amount of time prior to the wolf depredations, the Department will only consider lethal removal at a higher number of wolf depredation events and after deterrence measures have been tried and failed at resolving the conflict” (page 14, available online [here](#)).

As you know, wolf conservation and management in our state is one of the Department’s highest priorities, and I thank you for your concern and attention to this issue. Your request was to increase our reliance on non-lethal tools and significantly reduce the need for lethal removal of wolves. The strategies outlined above seek to do that and are in balance with the realities of the types of influence we can have on wild landscapes and private business owners.

The Department will continue regular communications with JT Austin to ensure you have situational awareness as we move further into the grazing season. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your interest and engagement on this important wildlife conservation and management issue.

Sincerely,



Kelly Susewind  
Director

Enclosures