

Wolf Advisory Group

Conference Call

February 13, 2019

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

WAG members: Diane Gallegos, Andy Hover, Dan Paul, Dave Duncan, Lisa Stone, Molly Linville, Paula Swedeen, Ralph Kratz, Sammee Charriere, Tim Coleman, Tom Davis, Nick Martinez, Jessica Kelley

WDFW staff members: Donny Martorello, Rob Geddis, Ben Maletzke, Julia Smith, Joey McCanna, Steve Pozzanghera, Trent Roussin, Matthew Trendera

Facilitator: Rob Geddis

Welcome and Check in

Rob welcomed everyone to the conference call and everyone checked in over the phone. He then reviewed the agenda before the meeting started.

Comment

Wanted to express concern about not being able to discuss the grazing season in person. Feels like we're pushing off the opportunity to do an assessment on last year's season and what the department found challenging and lessons learned. Here we are in February already.

Comment

Two items planned for the in-person meeting are postponed. One is the evaluation of last year's grazing season. The other was a review of the WAG communication agreements for 2018. WAG members in the past have shared with the department that they preferred conference calls to be information from the department, rather than detailed discussions. Concern that we couldn't give those two items justice over the phone. The hope is that an in-person meeting can be scheduled soon.

Comment

I agree that those things are tough to talk about over the phone, but I also share the concern. I think those concerns can be mitigated as long as we schedule an in-person meeting (or more than one) soon so those discussions can be had before the grazing season. We need to be very conscious of that time.

WAG current and future membership

Donny went over the recruitment process for new WAG members. The department is currently in a recruitment period for WAG members. There have been 24 applicants for vacancies (excluding the 10 who are reapplying). Two producers, seven environmentalists, five hunters, and 10 at large. Shawn Cantrell, Mark Pigeon, and Tom Erskine are leaving the WAG.

The department has conducted first round interviews, and second interviews will happen next week. After that, the Director will choose new members. There will also be an onboarding process as there was in the past.

Comment

Can you tell us right now the status of current members? What is the number of hunters, environmentalist, and producers who are hoping to remain on the WAG?

Comment

Good question and I'll do my best to answer here. Of the 10 who want to remain, there is a mix. In the recruitment process, there are balancing points. The identity is what we try to honor as we go through recruiting. We also think about balancing east/west, wolf territories, gender, and a variety of other things. We want to get as diverse and balanced as we can.

Comment

Of the three vacancies, what are the seat identities?

Comment

We had a hunter, an at large, and an environmental community member.

Comment

Is Bob Aegeter still on the WAG?

Comment

Bob was one of the first to move on to other opportunities, and that position was filled with the first recruitment of the five new members. The current roster is posted on the Wolf Advisory Group webpage.

Future WAG facilitator

Donny checked in with the group on a WAG facilitator. There is an RFQ, but it's paused. Options include bringing someone on through the end of June and carrying on through the next biennium. The department is working with the Legislature to get funding for a third party neutral. It may be difficult to bring someone on for a meeting or two and then have them leave if funding is not secured for the next biennium. The current thought is to wait and see if that funding is there before putting out the RFQ. Thoughts?

Comment

I thought the RFQ had already gone out. I thought the new facilitator would be announced today.

Comment

We have prepared the RFQ but haven't sent it out. We had a change of heart on that, because I'm very nervous about the lack of consistency. If WAG wants us to move forward on that, we can. But you are correct that this is a different dialogue than what we had before.

Comment

The RFQ is for a third party neutral, but funding is not secured yet? So if it goes out and we decide on a person, then funding doesn't come through, how would we pay for that?

Comment

Exactly, we wouldn't be able to pay for that. So that is the question. One option is we get the funding for now and through the next biennium. The other path is that we anticipate we get funding, bring a third party neutral on, but would have to let that person go if funding is not provided through the biennium.

Comment

I was very comfortable with the job Rob did in Spokane. I see no reason not to use Rob until we know we have funding through the next biennium.

Comment

I agree with that. Rob seems very neutral with how he conducted the meeting, and I am comfortable with him until we know we have secure funding.

Comment

I agree with that too. I think he did a great job.

Comment

I also agree.

Comment

I also agree that Rob did a great job. I'm trying to understand the communication that happens. I thought at the last meeting, we were told that money had been found. Was that money just for this six months?

Comment

That was likely an area where we failed to communicate it. Outside of the Wildlife Program, the entire agency committed to fund six months of third party neutral, and we would just absorb that. That is the money we found, which would get us through the current fiscal year. Then we would have to count on external funding for the next biennium. I'm having second thoughts about that now because of the consistency part.

Comment

Thank you. I get it now. I feel like I'm getting hit cold with this. I truly thought we'd be getting an announcement today. You can't call Rob a third party neutral because he is part of the

department, but he did do a great job. I don't think it makes sense to bring someone in for a couple meetings only to have them leave again.

Comment

I also think Rob did a great job, and we'll see where we are once we know more.

Comment

I agree it would be weird to get someone new now, and I also thought Rob did great.

Comment

I agree with other folks and have a lot of confidence in Rob.

Comment

How many meetings are anticipated before the fiscal year is over? Two?

Comment

That's up to WAG, but I would think two at least.

Comment

I'm also fine with the job that Rob did in Spokane.

WAG and the department decided to hold the RFQ until funding was secured. If the funding doesn't come, the department would check in with WAG for a different plan of action.

Commission wolf subcommittee and WAG participation

Donny did a quick check in with some of the commissioners in regard to commission participation in WAG. These members are recommending the creation of a wolf subcommittee. This would allow them to dive in a little deeper on the wolf issue. This subcommittee would have regular meetings and the anticipation is that they would engage in the WAG process as well. They haven't set anyone in particular yet, but it would be four commissioners, and I think they are looking for a diversity of perspectives in those four folks.

Grazing on WDFW Lands

As you all have been working and thinking about wolf-livestock interactions, internally we've been thinking how that looks on WDFW Lands. Are there different parts? Does the protocol apply the same to WDFW Lands? We've spent a lot of time thinking about the best way to approach this. Donny went over the list of talking points on where the department is right now.

Comment

I'm going to take huge issue with this aspect of WDFW's land management policy. The reason is that when WDFW purchases properties, it is private properties that they acquire for use. Right now, I know WDFW has a budget ask in for fully funding Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) money. Okanogan County loses money every year because PILT isn't funded. There is

also not enough funding for maintenance. As more property is acquired, WDFW land managers are further strained. If WDFW purchases a property that already has grazing on it, I'm going to push really hard for that land to be used as it was originally used as private land. If the department is going to come in and purchase private property, and then take grazing off that land, I would take huge issue with that. PILT funding does not just go to county current expense. It goes to schools, roads, and other areas.

Comment

This is Jim Brown, Regional Director for Region 2. I just wanted to let you know that I'm on the call, I hear what you're saying, and I have been in dialogue with the county on this grazing issue.

Comment

On this issue about PILT, my understanding is there is a bill in the Legislature this year that is working on fixing some of the past problems. My understanding is that the bill has some good momentum. I think that bill is designed to bring those funding levels back up.

Comment

I know about that bill and I appreciate you signing onto that. My other issue is that not allowing agriculture on those properties, all you're doing is shrinking that agricultural base. It's tough to keep it viable in Okanogan County if the department buys land and doesn't allow agriculture.

Comment

WDFW also has property in Asotin County. The viability of the grazing leases they've put out are pretty poor. I wouldn't sign onto them. In this area, all the fences and structures have been removed, so the department has literally taken away the viability there.

Comment

I agree with the concerns on PILT. Maintenance of properties has been a huge issue. There is a lot of concern about management of department grounds in our county.

Comment

I hope you didn't hear that the department is suddenly going to change grazing on our lands. That wasn't what I wanted to say. These talking points are mostly just to let you all know that these are just concepts. This is a topic of high interest, and I know there is a lot of history associated with PILT and other things. It may be worth it to carve some time out in upcoming meetings as a future agenda item.

Comment

This is Jim again. I have been in those discussions, and they have mostly been about how we balance grazing and other agricultural opportunities with other responsibilities and expanding wolf populations. With regard to the issues raised, that's not the direction these discussions are going.

Comment

I just wanted to add that this discussion relative to land acquisition and working landscapes, WDFW acquiring land and moving into the community while also being able to continue with those things that have been a part of that community, that has been front and center well before wolves were on the landscape. That working land value is there for department properties, whether it's new acquisitions or existing landscapes. I don't think any of us believe we can be successful without a working lands perspective.

Comment

I just wanted to say I did not feel that WDFW was going to change how they're doing things. I just wanted everyone on the phone to know that this needs to be carefully approached. If policy does look like it's changing, we're going to have county commissioners fight against the department acquiring land. I know everyone so far has done a great job with that working landscapes perspective, but just wanted folks to be aware.

Comment

We have range ecologists on staff now that have given us a better assessment on the ground. That's allowed us to find ways to use grazing as a tool to improve habitats. The department has taken quite a few proactive steps to keep working lands as part of our portfolio. We're still heading in that direction while also trying to be smarter and meet the wildlife needs on the ground.

Comment

Be careful about setting a higher bar on WDFW lands.

Comment

I'd like to voice a conservation perspective on this. I support WDFW looking into this issue in greater detail. Of course federal lands is the same thing. Livestock and grazing may have benefits, but ungrazed land also has benefits. Recreation value is there. There are obvious conflicts there as well relative to managing one species over another, with all respect to the livestock producers, because I know they have a lot to deal with as well.

Member questions from emailed updates

A number of updates went out last week, including scat-sniffing dogs, the predator/prey project being conducted by the department, and a study on the DNA of wolves in the Profanity territory in 2016, the Sherman territory in 2017, and the OPT territory in 2018 to see if they may have contained the same wolves.

Comment

I tried to watch that Senate hearing. Did they come up with a number of individual animals that they've found with those dogs?

Comment

The estimate they came up with within the study area was significantly higher than the department's minimum counts. We don't have a lot of information on the methods yet. We've got a meeting next week to look at the methodology and get more details on how they came to that estimate. I don't know what modeling tools they used, or if they calculated the actual number of individuals. There are a number of different things to discuss there, as they did the study in a different time of year, and the methods may be different. We still have to figure out things like the age of those scats and how long they've been on the landscape. We're looking at the comparison to see how relevant those numbers are. There are a number of different things that could influence those population numbers. When we meet with them, we'll know more.

Comment

I wanted to add to that last discussion that I've had a few talks with that lab and wanted to convey to everyone my understanding of that approach. They understand why there would be differences between the numbers. There are a lot of reasons why those numbers would be different. That part of NE Washington is close to B.C. and Idaho, so there could be a lot of movement through the area. Also, as was said, the time of year makes a difference. I've seen some people accusing the department of intentionally keeping numbers low, but I have confidence that is not happening, and I'm looking forward to the outcome of the meeting. I just wanted to note that because it makes me uncomfortable to see WDFW in that situation.

Comment

That was a good point about resident versus transient wolves. Do we not count transient wolves on the landscape?

Comment

They are harder to get a number on, but we do count them. We always do add them in with our buffers. We do try to incorporate that in our estimates. The numbers are based on the literature. Everything else is based on our actual counts.

Comment

I know WDFW works off minimum counts. Do you work off a high count as well, or just work off the minimum counts?

Comment

We want to keep the survey method the same, and where we do have packs on the landscape, we can go back and see those same wolves. We look for that consistency in our flights. We do say a minimum count because we know we can't count every animal on the landscape. It's just a consistent approach that we can look at and compare. It is kind of a relative number each year, but if we keep our survey methodology the same each year, we can better monitor and work off that data. There are definitely other tools out there, but it's what we use each year to be consistent.

Comment

On TVW, you can do a search for that Senate committee hearing and see the update if you want to do that.

Post delisting plan timeline

The timeline was posted to the WAG page. WDFW had two deliverables for this WAG meeting. One of them was this post delisting timeline. WAG built a timeline last summer. The timeline that has been shared is the map covering everything from pre-scoping to publication of the post delisting plan. This is very high-level right now. WDFW is building a comprehensive project plan right now, with all of these items broken down into multiple steps. The other part is sending WAG members out into communities and, in terms of scoping, asking what the issues are that the department should focus on through this process. We want to discuss the issue versus a desired outcome. Is this something we want to do over the phone, as individuals, or in the next in-person meeting?

Comment

Is the pre-scoping from now until September? Then scoping for a couple months?

Comment

That's correct.

Comment

That seems like a short period for scoping and a pretty long period for pre-scoping.

Comment

It's supposed to be at least a 45-60 day scoping period. One other thing to think about is when you look at that left hand column, think about where those things occur on the calendar. Is it during hunting season? Is it during holidays? Is it during session?

Comment

I don't personally feel like we can schedule around things. We all have different busy times of the year and we all just need to get on with it.

Comment

Can you talk more about the multi-layered process timeline we came up with last summer? There's a lot of emphasis on making sure we have meaningful discussions with the public. Can you repeat that or go into more depth? How are you feeling about staffing and resources and things like that? Maybe how you expect us to help and go over when we're needed?

Comment

The plan was to have this and the big timeline available to all of us in an in-person meeting so we could discuss where we are right now. If you think about pre-scoping, intertwined with the conflict transformation process there was a piece where WAG would go out and ask

communities what issues they wanted to discuss throughout this process. If you unpack each of these items in the timeline, we wanted to go over those touch points during our in-person meeting. It's kind of hard over the phone, but we'll need to keep workshopping how we engage with as many communities as possible.

Comment

That was good, and we can dive into it more when we have our next in-person meeting.

Comment

One thing I'm wondering is whether the plan part needs to always be at an in-person meeting. Could that be smaller groups?

Comment

I would find it really helpful to have some kind of electronic survey to distribute to the community. I don't have anything right now to add to the delisting plan, but wanted to flag that.

Future meeting dates

Comment

Would like to schedule another meeting as soon as possible (hopefully next month), with a second one before the end of the fiscal year.

Comment

I think with the workload we need to have two meetings before the end of the fiscal year. Is there a way to schedule an early March and then perhaps an early April meeting?

Comment

I would echo that. Soon and then another one soon after that.

Comment

I agree that soon would be great. As soon as the first week of March. I would extend the second meeting into maybe early May so we have time to do as much as possible.

Comment

I also think we need two meetings to cover everything we need to cover before the grazing season. Would like them to get scheduled soon if possible.

Comment

I think an early March is a great idea. I'm assuming that will be in Olympia. If we do the next one in April, it will be tough to have that one anywhere other than Olympia as well.

Comment

I'm wondering if a poll would be helpful here. If Rob could send out a poll that covers March, April, and May. I heard a value to get as many WAG members as possible at both meetings. Let's see what that poll gets us.

Comment

I think that's a good idea, but I want us to remember how much work it took to get that protocol in 2016 and 2017. We discussed in February, then had proposals in March, then the department took until about June to have that protocol in place. I'm concerned we won't have enough time to do everything. I think meeting in early March and late March makes more sense to me if we want to have enough time.

Comment

I agree with that.

Comment

I could only agree with that if I agreed major changes were needed to the protocol. I don't think major changes are needed for the protocol.

Comment

I would be relieved if major changes were not needed to the protocol.

Comment

Are we working under the model that if there are two early meetings, they are both in Olympia?

Comment

Going to Olympia twice is not going to happen for me.

Comment

I think we can do a lot of the heavy lifting in the first meeting, then meet in April or early May and finalize things. We're at the point where we're tweaking what we've already done.

Comment

Early May would be preferable since session gets out in late April.

Comment

It does put us in a tough spot because making those changes in the document takes a little bit of time. If the meeting is in May, the turnaround crunches us and puts us in a spot where it'll be tough to hit that deadline.

Comment

What's the latest for that second meeting?

Comment

I would say mid-April at the latest.

Comment

I will say that Mondays and Tuesdays are really hard for me. The other days are better for me. I'm not sure how everyone else feels, but wanted to convey that.

Rob will send out a poll and WAG can explore the different options discussed today.

Field trip

Is a field trip still something that has interest before June?

Comment

I think we need a field trip, but I don't know if we can get it before June.

Comment

Definitely seems like a stretch before the grazing season.

Comment

Field trips are great because it gives us opportunity to have that kind of informal interaction while also seeing firsthand what it is we're talking about in these meetings. Seeing landscapes and seeing the work others are doing helps broaden our perspectives.

Comment

There was one we took that was optional, but everyone in WAG was invited. We had a discussion on the practical aspect of implementing nonlethal deterrents. That really helped us understand that aspect of this. I think that might be valuable as we get new WAG members. What does that mean on certain landscapes and how do we adapt those tools we all rely on?

Verdict: Field trip would be great, but probably a stretch before the grazing season.

Check out

Everyone checked out on the phone.

Meeting adjourned