

# **WDFW NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Washington's wolf population increases for 9th straight year**

OLYMPIA – Washington's wolf population continued to grow in 2017 for the ninth straight year, according to the results of an annual survey conducted by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

The state was home to at least 122 wolves, 22 packs, and 14 successful breeding pairs, based on field surveys conducted over the winter by state, tribal, and federal wildlife managers.

Survey findings reflect information from aerial surveys, remote cameras, wolf tracks, and signals from radio-collared wolves.

Ben Maletzke, WDFW statewide wolf specialist, said today that all of those totals were the highest recorded since the department began conducting the surveys in 2008. Last year's survey documented 115 wolves, 20 packs, and 10 breeding pairs.

Maletzke emphasized the surveys represent "minimum counts" of wolves in Washington state, due to the difficulty of accounting for every animal – especially lone wolves without a pack.

"Here and in other states, wolf demographics are highly dynamic from year to year," Maletzke said. "The real value of these surveys is the information they provide about long-term trends, which show that our state's wolf population has grown by an annual average of 31 percent over the past decade."

Maletzke said the study documented four new packs – the Frosty, Grouse Flats, Leadpoint, and Togo packs – all located east of the Cascade Mountains. Two previously identified packs – the Skookum and Sherman packs – were not included in the pack totals for last year because the first could not be located and the second now appears to have only one member.

Wildlife managers have also been tracking the movements of a wolf in the North Cascades in Skagit County that was captured and fitted with a radio-collar last June, but so far no other wolves have been confirmed in the area, Maletzke said.

All but eliminated from western states in the last century, Washington's wolf population has rebounded since 2008, when wildlife managers documented a resident pack in Okanogan County. According to the 2017 survey, 15 of the 22 known packs are located in Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties in the northeast corner of the state.

Since 1980, gray wolves have been listed under state law as endangered throughout Washington. In the western two-thirds of the state, they are also listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act.

As the state's wolf population has continued to grow, WDFW has expanded its efforts to collaborate with livestock producers, conservation groups, and local residents to prevent conflict between wolves and domestic animals, Maletzke said.

WDFW employed an array of non-lethal strategies last year to reduce conflicts, including cost-sharing agreements with 37 ranchers who took proactive steps to protect their livestock. State assistance included range riders to check on livestock, guard dogs, lighting, flagging for fences, and data on certain packs' movements.

Maletzke said five of the 22 known packs that existed in Washington at some point during 2017 were involved in at least one livestock mortality. After conducting investigations, WDFW confirmed that wolves killed at least eight cattle and injured five others last year. WDFW processed two claims totaling \$3,700 to compensate livestock producers for their losses in 2017.

"We know that some level of conflict is inevitable between wolves and livestock sharing the landscape," Maletzke said. "Our goal is to minimize that conflict as the gray wolf population continues to recover."

State management of wolves is guided by the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan of 2011, along with a protocol approved by WDFW to reduce those conflicts.

Consistent with the management plan and protocol, the department used lethal action to address repeated predation on livestock by two wolf packs after non-lethal measures failed. WDFW euthanized one member of the Sherman pack, which killed four cattle and injured another during last year's summer grazing season. The department also removed two wolves from the Smackout pack, which had a history of preying on livestock in 2016 and killed two cattle and injured another during the 2017 grazing season.

The survey also documented 11 wolf mortalities in 2017 attributed to legal tribal harvest (3), legal "caught-in-the-act" shootings (2), vehicle collisions (2), and four (4) other incidents involving humans that are still under investigation.

Contributors to WDFW's annual survey include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program, the Confederated Colville Tribes and the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

The results will be reviewed with the State Fish and Wildlife Commission on March 17 in Wenatchee. Complete survey results will be posted on WDFW's website by March 30 at [https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/gray\\_wolf/](https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/gray_wolf/).

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