

State OKs killing of wolf pack members preying on cattle

AP – NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS – SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on Wednesday authorized killing some members of a wolf pack that are preying on cattle in the northeastern corner of the state.

Agency director Kelly Susewind said the state will kill part of the OPT pack, for the second year in a row, in an effort to change the behavior of the pack.

The action comes after a cow was found on Saturday in Ferry County that had been killed and partially consumed by wolves.

“This is a very difficult situation for all those involved, especially given the history of wolf-livestock conflict in this area,” Susewind said. “Our goal is to change this pack’s behavior.”

Wolf tracks were seen near where the cow was found, the agency said.

Last year, the agency killed several members of the OPT pack that were preying on livestock, but left some members of the pack alive.

Conservation groups contend that repeatedly killing wolves in the same area does not stop cattle depredations.

“Instead, our wildlife agency should walk its own talk about using innovative solutions,” said Sophia Ressler of the Center for Biological Diversity, which opposes the killing of wolves.

“State and federal officials could find an alternate grazing allotment that isn’t such fantastic wolf habitat,” she said.

Wolves were wiped out in the state by the 1930s on behalf of livestock interests. But the animals started returning to the state early this century from surrounding areas. Most of the wolves live in the northeastern corner of the state, where they have prompted numerous conflicts with livestock producers.

The WDFW said the state had a minimum of 126 wolves in 27 packs with 15 successful breeding pairs last year. For the first time, a wolf pack was found living west of the Cascade Range.

Gray wolves are no longer listed as an endangered species under federal protection in eastern Washington. They are still federally protected across the rest of the state, although the federal government is considering lifting those protections.

Susewind said the OPT pack has repeatedly preyed on cattle on federal grazing lands in the Kettle River Range.

Last year, the OPT pack was involved in 16 depredations in less than two months. That prompted the WDFW to kill two members of the pack last September, leaving two members alive.

The WDFW said the pack has since grown to five adult wolves and four pups.

The rancher involved in this case has taken numerous steps to protect his livestock from wolves, and efforts to kill some wolves will begin almost immediately, the agency said.

The agency said it will kill one or more wolves and then evaluate whether more need to be killed to prevent livestock depredations.

Posted by: [NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS](#), [AP](#), July 10, 2019