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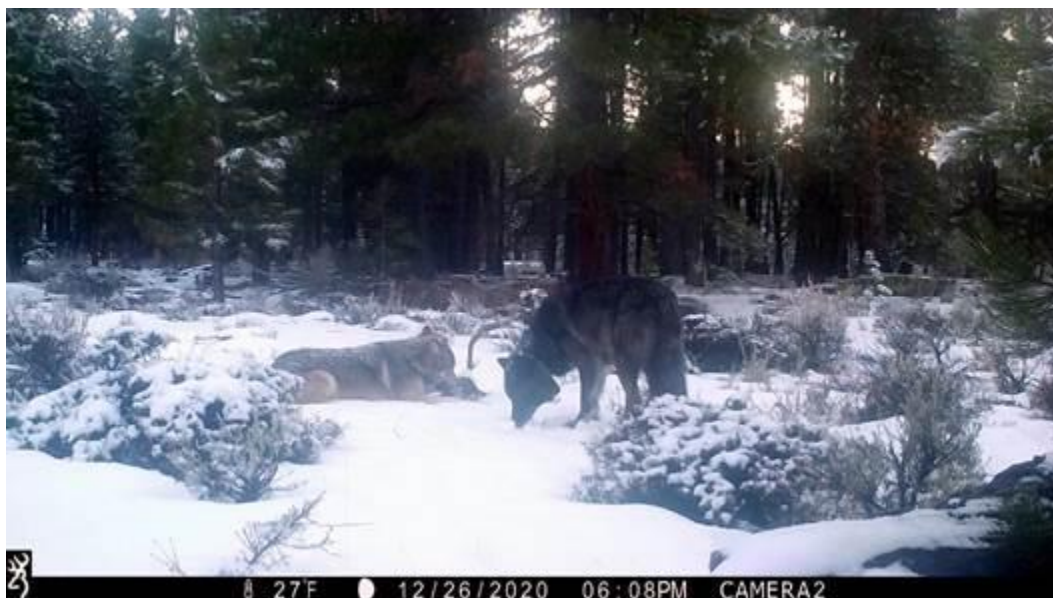
Oregon wolves could be expanding their range into California

By Erik Neumann (Jefferson Public Radio)

Feb. 16, 2021 7:04 a.m.

Several wolves recently crossed state lines from established packs in Oregon into California. Experts say dispersing wolves could expand territory and strengthen the species' genetic diversity.

Last week, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife identified OR-93, a wolf traveling from the White River Pack in Oregon's Warm Springs Reservation area to Lassen County, California. And in December, a member of Oregon's Mt. Emily Pack known as OR-85 was caught on camera in Siskiyou County, California, with another unidentified wolf.



The wolf known as OR-85 (right) photographed on a trail camera in December in Siskiyou County with a second, unidentified wolf.

With permission from Scott Sumner

The presence of a second wolf could be significant for California's small wolf population, according to Kent Laudon, a wolf specialist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"We're pretty close to being certain that it is a female," said Laudon, of the second wolf. "And then if all that stays the same, there's a high likelihood that we'll have pups in April. And that will be the second reproducing pack in California."

The presence of the other wolf, OR-93 from the White River Pack, is also significant since it traveled to Lassen County, California, all the way from Wasco County, in north-central Oregon. Genetic diversity spread across large areas will help species better survive, according to Amaroq Weiss, senior West Coast wolf advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity.

"The wolves that are wandering across Oregon and coming down to California are basically ground-truthing what scientists have told us and literature that [has] examined where is a good habitat for wolves," Weiss said.

Neither the Siskiyou County wolf liaison who works with local ranchers or a representative from the California Cattleman's Association was available to comment.

According to Laudon with CDFW, wolves can range across hundreds and even thousands of miles once dispersed from their original pack. But once they mate and form a new pack they stay in one area.

"Of those wolves that are doing that, whether collared or not, are finding each other and pair-bonding and reproducing, that part starts to become very significant," he said.

The pair in Siskiyou County has a current range of about 350 square miles, Laudon said.

There are currently 158 known wolves in Oregon and eight in California, according to Weiss with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Wolves were recently delisted from protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. That move by the Trump administration is being challenged in court. Wolves are still protected under California's state Endangered Species Act and in Oregon by state statute.