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OF THE UNITED STATES

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Living with Wolves



August 17, 2017

The Honorable Governor Kate Brown
900 Court Street NE, 160
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Governor Brown,

On August 1, 2017, Oregon Wild contacted you about a pending request by livestock managers to kill wolves. Since that time, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has killed two members of the Harl Butte Wolf Pack – including one by helicopter – and issued kill orders for two additional wolves. These controversial decisions are unnecessary and counterproductive, and have deepened public mistrust of ODFW.

The agency is in the midst of updating the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (now 2 years overdue). Key provisions of the draft proposal are unenforceable and indefensible. The draft includes weak sideboards and requirements for public accountability, allows trophy hunting, and will lead to even more unnecessary conflict in coming years. Independent scientists cited in the plan have publicly stated it is fundamentally flawed and that their science is being misrepresented.

Governor Brown, your leadership is needed to refocus ODFW on its conservation mission and to ensure Oregon has a wolf conservation plan that reduces conflict between wolves and livestock, makes killing nothing short of a last resort, and increases transparency and accountability by ODFW.

Concerning the Harl Butte pack, ODFW chose to kill four wolves at the request of a livestock manager for an out-of-state company. The action could drop the state's known adult wolf population to 107 – less than in 2015. It occurred in an area where local livestock interests have openly advocated against non-lethal measures to deter conflict, where dozens of permits to kill wolves have been issued in the past decade, and where ODFW has used public money to kill 10 wolves to accommodate the livestock industry. This includes the killing of an entire pack by helicopter last year. Rather than a wolf problem, the Harl Butte situation raises disturbing questions about ODFW's ability and willingness to require livestock operations to make meaningful efforts to avoid conflict.

The majority of conflict in this area has occurred on public lands where unattended livestock greatly outnumber elk and deer. ODFW has not been able to provide the public with sufficient details of what non-lethal measures were deployed to prevent conflict at key times. What information has been made available was only released after kill orders were issued, and leaves key questions unanswered.

In justifying the escalation to shooting wolves, ODFW has cited livestock conflicts that occurred over a year ago for which the wolves currently in the area may very well not be responsible and non-lethal measures are unclear.

Making matters worse, ODFW has now announced they will no longer proactively provide the public with information such as when, how, and which wolves are killed. For an agency that exists to serve the people of Oregon, this is simply unacceptable.

Killing wolves is expensive, dangerous, and controversial. Science has shown that wolf killing leads to increases in conflict with livestock. Killing disrupts important social structures and affects a pack's ability to hunt deer and elk. Research has shown it only makes it more likely the animals will turn to livestock to feed themselves and their offspring. This has played out in Oregon and Washington where livestock conflict and wolf killing efforts have occurred in the same areas year after year.

Recent science also shows a decrease in public acceptance of the recovering native carnivores when states kill wolves or reduce protections. Killing wolves emboldens rather than assuages poachers and other lawbreakers, and – especially with a compensation program in places – if the agency repeatedly issues kill permits, it further reduces incentives for livestock operators to faithfully use non-lethal deterrence which are more effective and economical.

Under ODFW's current draft proposal to modify the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, pups as young as 4-months old could be killed by trophy hunters for conflict with unattended livestock on public lands with little more than someone's word that they occasionally checked on their animals. The public may never understand the basic facts until after wolves have been killed – if ever. If the agency proceeds on this course, it will serve only to further polarize wolf conservation in our state, and further erode public support for the agency.

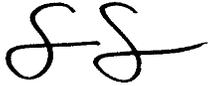
Solutions are readily available. Upon his retirement in 2014, outgoing ODFW Director Roy Elicker cited as his proudest accomplishment an agreement between the livestock industry, conservationists and the state that provided clear expectations and sideboards for the agency and stakeholders. Those provisions have expired in Eastern Oregon. Under those clear rules, timely transparency and earnest efforts to prevent conflict increased. Oregon was the only state in the nation that achieved a management framework where wolf populations went up, conflict declined, and lethal actions did not *need* to be taken. These provisions should be carried forward in the revised wolf plan.

Since 2015, wolf conservation has gone in the wrong direction here in Oregon. It seems the only thing disparate stakeholders can agree upon is that ODFW has lost its way.

Governor Brown, our organizations, and the people of Oregon, need your help to get ODFW and wolf management in our state, back on track. The Harl Butte situation again calls into question the effectiveness of killing wolves and demonstrates the need for clearer sideboards around what non-lethal actions must be attempted before trapping and shooting of wolves will be allowed.

ODFW's action in recent weeks clearly demonstrates the need for stronger requirements for transparency and public accountability. We stand ready to work with your staff, and the staff of ODFW, to develop a plan that achieves these goals, and ensures Oregonians can once again be proud of our state's wolf conservation program.

Sincerely,



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