



**Meeting Report
Wolf Conservation Stakeholder Subgroup
April 29, 2014**

CDFW Headquarters Building
Legal Conference Room
1416 9th Street, Room 1341
Sacramento, CA 95814



Photo courtesy of Bruce Bohlander

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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1.0 Introduction

On April 29, 2014 the Wolf Conservation Subgroup (WCS) of the California Wolf Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) convened in the Conference Room of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of General Counsel. This was the fourth meeting of the WCS, which was established to help the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, Department) develop a consensus-driven framework of strategies for wolf conservation and management in California.

2.0 Meeting Objectives and Mechanics

The purpose of the meeting was to continue discussion of potential topics for inclusion in a Wolf Conservation chapter in the California Wolf Plan.

Objectives of the meeting as initially planned were:

1. Introductions and Housekeeping
2. Review and discuss draft operating assumptions for CA wolf conservation planning
3. General discussion of potential California strategy
 - a. Potential landscape management units
 - b. Conservation (population) objectives
 - c. Phasing/timing
 - d. Regulatory component
4. Planning
 - a. Suggestions from the environmental caucus for joint fact-finding
 - i. Proposal to do joint fact-finding on the effects of human exploitation (agency lethal control actions of wolves, hunting of wolves, trapping of wolves, poaching of wolves, etc) on wolf packs
 - ii. Proposal to do joint fact-finding on the setting of population objectives and the use of zoning in developing and administering wolf conservation and management plans and alternative approaches that do not set population objectives and do not create zones
5. Public questions

The meeting was attended in person by four stakeholders and three CDFW staff, with three additional stakeholders attending via conference line. Appendix A provides a list of participants, their affiliations, and their contact information, and Appendix B contains the meeting agenda.

3.0 Meeting Outputs

Review/Discuss Draft Operating Assumptions for CA Wolf Conservation Planning

Mr. Stopher began this discussion by explaining that the Operating Assumptions document (Appendix C) was intended to test some assumptions the Department is operating under in drafting the Wolf Conservation chapter. The timeframe of 15 years until California has an established wolf population was based on Oregon's experience of approximately 10 years between the first documented wolf sightings, until establishment of the first recorded breeding. Five years was added to that figure as an estimate of time before Oregon's population will have expanded to within dispersal range from California. The group discussed each item in the document, and stakeholders provided feedback.

For item #3, Mr. Stopher provided some additional information regarding the implications of Oregon's quickly growing wolf population:

1. Immigration into Oregon from Idaho is no longer likely to be an important contributing factor for growth in Oregon's wolf population
2. Oregon's wolf population is growing rapidly
3. Oregon is likely to produce a population that will be a source for California

He further clarified that the assumptions provided are predicated on current management strategies in Oregon, and that they won't change in the near term.

Suggestions included:

- Parse out the types of roads impacting wolf distribution (Item #4)
- Add "successfully" before "established (Item #4)
- Add a footnote or explanation that wolf mortality is higher in areas with higher road density (Item #4)
- Define the type of forest cover wolves are positively correlated with (Item #4)
- We should determine if the models used to predict suitable wolf habitat incorporate suitability for wolf dens (Item #4)
- In addition to the predictions of where wolves may occur, establish where they are not likely to be based on insufficient prey (Item #4)
- Eagle Cap Wilderness in Northeast Oregon may provide a good comparison to California given a similar ungulate and forest densities
- Change "other western states" to "Oregon and Washington" in (Item #7)
- Suggest a footnote explaining that Northern Rockies wolves started from an introduced population placed in a large refugium but that won't happen in CA (Item #7)

- Change “will not be lawful” to “is not likely” to avoid taking away a management option from the Department (Item #9)
- Have a separate section to address legal and policy related items (Item #9)
- Explain what near-term means (Item #9)
- Clarify that the estimated 6 successful breeding pairs in Item #11 was derived from the experience in Oregon

Planning

This discussion was focused on discussing some suggested joint fact-finding by stakeholder members, including effects of human exploitation on wolf packs. The motivation for this suggestion was the documentation that wolf packs have dissolved in the wake of one or more breeding adults being killed, leading to orphaned pups and potential loss of cultural information. Further, the volume of human-caused wolf mortalities has potential to exceed that of natural mortality. The Department acknowledged that this is a valid concern that should be addressed in the Wolf Conservation chapter, and that it has management implications for other parts of the plan, but that there may be insufficient time to do joint fact-finding with the WCS. Stakeholders were reminded that the Department is ultimately responsible for managing wildlife at the population level, not at the individual level.

The second discussion item in this section was a proposal for joint fact-finding on whether or not to use landscape management units, and to set specific population objectives for these units. Stakeholders explained that there seems to have been some assumptions made in setting such objectives in other states, and they have a desire to try and determine if there is a basis for those assumptions. Mr. Stopher suggested that he and Ms. Converse will do the fact-finding and report back to the WCS at their next meeting.

Conclusion

Mr. Stopher requested that any additional questions or recommendations be provided by May 15th.

The meeting concluded with rescheduling the next meeting. It was originally set for May 21st, but due to several conflicts, was rescheduled for 12:00pm to 3:00pm on May 27th.

Action Items:

- Determine what assumptions were made in developing landscape management units and specific wolf population objectives for those units in other states
- Incorporate stakeholder suggestions in the draft Operating Assumptions document as appropriate, in preparation for next meeting

APPENDIX A
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation	Email
Stakeholders		
Noelle Cremers	California Farm Bureau	ncremers@cfbf.com
John McNerney	The Wildlife Society – Western Section	jmcnerney@cityofdavis.org
Jerry Springer	CA Deer Association	jerry@westernhunter.com
Lesa Eidman	CA Woolgrowers Assn	lesa@woolgrowers.org
Amaroq Weiss	Center for Biological Diversity	aweiss@biologicaldiversity.org
Rich Fletcher	Mule Deer Foundation	richfletcher@sbcglobal.net
Damon Nagami	Natural Resources Defense Council	dnagami@nrdc.org
California Department of Fish and Wildlife Staff		
Karen Converse	Environmental Scientist – Wolf Program	karen.converse@wildlife.ca.gov
Mark Stopher	Senior Policy Advisor – CDFW	mark.stopher@wildlife.ca.gov
Karen Kovacs	Wildlife Program Manager – Region 1; Wolf Management Planning Lead	karen.kovacs@wildlife.ca.gov

APPENDIX B - AGENDA

PROPOSED AGENDA

Conservation Objectives Subgroup

1-4 April 29, 2014

Room 1341, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento

Teleconference Line 888-379-9287, Participant Code: 476990

Proposed Agenda

1. Housekeeping and Introductions
2. Review/discuss draft operating assumption for CA wolf conservation planning [90 minutes]
3. General discussion of potential California strategy [60 minutes]
 - Potential landscape management units
 - Conservation (population) objectives
 - Phasing/timing
 - Regulatory component
4. Planning [15 minutes]
 - Suggestions from the environmental caucus for joint fact finding:
 - Proposal to do joint fact-finding on the effects of human exploitation (agency lethal control actions of wolves, hunting of wolves, trapping of wolves, poaching of wolves, etc.) on wolf packs.
 - Proposal to do joint fact-finding on the setting of population objectives and the use of zoning in developing and administering wolf conservation and management plans and alternative approaches that do not set population objectives and do not create zones.
5. Public questions (last 10 minutes)

APPENDIX C
OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS FOR
CA WOLF CONSERVATION PLANNING

Operating Assumptions for CA Wolf Conservation Planning – near term (assume through 2030)

1. CA population will exchange individuals with Oregon population
2. Net positive immigration from Oregon into California
3. Oregon population data reflect recent annual wolf population growth in that state
 - 2010 50%
 - 2011 38%
 - 2012 58%
 - 2013 39%
4. When wolf packs become established in CA their distribution will be:
 1. Positively correlated with:
 1. proximity to Oregon
 2. wild ungulate density
 3. with forest cover
 2. Negatively correlated with:
 1. human density
 2. domestic livestock density
 3. non-forested rangeland and intensive agricultural lands
 4. road density
5. Existing information is not sufficient to confidently estimate the long-term carrying capacity for wolves in CA
6. Existing information is sufficient to predict those geographic areas most likely to provide suitable habitat for wolf packs in the near term
7. Due to the absence of large refugia areas, mix of public and private lands, relatively low elk populations, fragmented habitat, restricted sources for immigration and reliance on natural dispersal for initial recruitment into CA, the wolf population in CA is likely to grow at a slower rate than observed to date in other western states
8. For the same reasons listed in #7, the wolf population is likely to be smaller, in the long-term than in Oregon or Washington
9. Hunting and trapping of wolves by private entities will not be lawful in the near-term
10. Table 4, Chapter 3, in the WA Wolf Plan reflects a reasonable projection for planning purposes of the relationship between wolf numbers, packs and successful breeding pairs.
11. In the near term, the CA wolf population will likely be composed of no more than 6 successful breeding pairs.