



**Meeting Report  
Wolf Conservation Stakeholder Subgroup  
May 27, 2014**

CDFW Headquarters Building  
Legal Conference Room  
1416 9<sup>th</sup> 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 May 27, 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 fifth 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. Housekeeping and Introductions
2. Updates
3. Review/discuss/revise April 29 meeting report
4. Review/discuss Chapron paper provided May 14 for implications regarding management units and population objectives
5. Review/discuss revised operating assumptions for CA wolf conservation planning
6. General discussion of elements to potentially include in California strategy
  - a. Potential landscape management units
  - b. Conservation (population) objectives
  - c. Phasing/timing
  - d. Regulatory component
7. Planning
  - a. Review outstanding list of necessary fact-finding or other tasks
8. Public questions

The meeting was attended in person by three stakeholders and three CDFW staff, with four additional stakeholders and one additional CDFW staff attending via conference line. Appendix A provides a list of participants, their affiliations, and their contact information. In addition, two legislative representatives attended via conference line. Appendix B provides those individual's names, affiliations and contact information. Appendix C contains the meeting agenda.

### **3.0 Meeting Outputs**

#### **Housekeeping and Introductions**

After individuals introduced themselves Mr. Stopher pointed out that the date on the agenda says May 21 but should instead read May 27.

#### **Updates**

Ms. Kovacs spoke with Russ Morgan from Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) about the recent discovery of a second wolf found on trail camera in the vicinity of OR7 in southern Oregon. The plan is to collect scat for DNA to determine if the new animal is a female and possibly from where he or she originates. ODFW also plans to eventually try to locate a den which will indicate whether reproduction has occurred, and to recollar OR7 if they do find signs that reproduction took place. Mr. Stopher added that with a 63 day gestation period, if OR7 and this new wolf did reproduce they would have been together for at least that long. The fact that one dispersing wolf is located in southern Oregon is an indication that there may be others as well, including in northern California. Finally, as first-time mates, the chance of their successfully raising the entire litter is low.

Next, Mr. Stopher told the group about three papers provided by the “environmental caucus” on the topic of minimum viable population. He did not plan to discuss them at today’s meeting, but they were forwarded to all members of the Wolf Conservation Subgroup for consideration. The articles provide an appropriate background on the topic which will be addressed in the wolf conservation chapter. Some members expressed concerns about establishing objectives for a “viable” wolf population for California in light of some suggestions that the state’s ungulate populations may not be adequate to support many wolves, and therefore a California wolf population may always be dependent on immigration from Oregon. To that Mr. Stopher reminded the group of the interest by many in the public for a viable wolf population, and the wildlife laws the Department is mandated to follow.

#### **Review/Discuss/Revise April 29 Meeting Report**

No suggestions for revision were provided.

#### **Review/Discuss Chapron Paper**

Next, Mr. Stopher explained some aspects of the Chapron et al. (2003) paper titled “Conservation and control strategies for the wolf (*Canis lupus*) in western Europe based on demographic models.” This study used a stochastic population model (i.e. a model of population growth that incorporates levels of environmental uncertainty and variability) to estimate the possible trajectories of wolf populations managed under either a zoned

approach or a non-zoned but adaptive approach. Zoned management has been used in other western states, but some stakeholders in California have suggested exploring a non-zoned but adaptive approach, so the Department presented this paper for the group's consideration. According to Chapron et al. (2003) using a zoned approach to wolf management requires carefully monitoring the population, and having tight controls on mortality because zones may be too small to support an adequate number of breeding pairs to be viable in the long term. Such subpopulations are extremely sensitive to mortality and to slight changes in life-stage-specific survival probabilities. Additionally, on a landscape scale, having increased wolf mortality in one zone compels action in that zone, regardless of how well subpopulations in other zones may be doing.

An alternative approach suggested by Chapron et al. (2003) is to monitor the overall wolf population in the state, and institute a strategy that adapts yearly based on population changes from the previous year. Under such an approach, when the statewide wolf population grows by more than some prescribed amount in a given year, control actions via wolf tags and/or lethal control for livestock depredation management can be allowed up to some predetermined percentage of the population. Under such an approach, local changes in wolf population become less important as long as the overall population is maintained above some minimum level statewide.

The Department does not advocate for one approach over the other but presents the concepts for stakeholder consideration of both approaches. WCS members agreed that it would be helpful to have the two approaches presented in a table format that would facilitate a side-by-side comparison.

### **Review/Discuss Revised Operating Assumptions for CA Wolf Conservation Planning (Appendix C)**

This discussion began with a suggestion that the Department, in preparation for the next meeting, also consider the idea of California's wolf population as part of a regional metapopulation, closely tied to Oregon's population. Mr. Stopher explained that some of the operating assumptions actually depend on that idea, hitching California to Oregon via net immigration of wolves, as long as Oregon's wolf management remains what it is today. However any significant changes to wolf management in Oregon will possibly cause the Department to reevaluate our assumptions and institute a revised strategy. Ms. Kovacs added that the concept of an interstate wolf team is one to consider as a potential strategy for the future.

Mr. Stopher then read the changes he had incorporated in the Operating Assumptions document after last meeting's discussion, as well as those which still needed incorporating. Items that remain to be addressed include defining forest cover, road density, and intensively managed agricultural lands. These assumptions will inform the

two approaches the Department will construct for the group's consideration at the next meeting, and Mr. Stopher asked them to consider them carefully and be prepared to provide feedback.

Item 13, which is based on Oregon's and Washington's experiences with wolf recolonization, generated considerable discussion in the group. Concerns expressed were as follows:

- six breeding pairs may be too high considering the significantly different ungulate populations in California versus Oregon and Washington
- the wording might lead some to assume that the Department is setting a cap of six wolves for California

Suggestions made to Items 15 and 16 were as follows:

- Wolf reintroduction in the northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) occurred by placing a substantial number of animals in highly suitable habitat, which are very different conditions than wolves reestablishing naturally in California so the growth rate will differ here than in the NRM
- You should eliminate Item 16 as it has no scientific basis or revise to reflect current facts

### **General Discussion of Elements to Potentially Include in CA Strategy**

This topic also included discussion of the concepts of a zonal versus a non-zonal approach to wolf management in California. Mr. Stopher suggested that under a non-zonal adaptive approach such as that suggested by Chapron et al. (2003), management using lethal methods could be allocated to focus reducing impacts on livestock or sensitive ungulate populations, and the Department will attempt to find examples of where this may have been used in the North America. One suggestion for potential elements was offered:

- I would be interested in identifying what the population objectives would be and what management actions would be allowed under either approach

### **Conclusion**

Although a subsequent meeting was previously scheduled for June 24<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Stopher will be unavailable for that date, so the group rescheduled the next meeting for June 17<sup>th</sup> from 9am to 12pm.

### **Action Items:**

- Develop a comparison table of zoned versus non-zoned/adaptive approach to wolf management and what the management strategies would be under each
- Resend the corrected 2013 multi-state data on livestock depredations and wolf populations to SWG members
- Change #7 to #9 in Item 11 of the Operating Assumptions
- Clarify the wording in Item 13 of the Operating Assumptions to reflect that the figure of 6 successful breeding pairs is based upon the intrinsic growth potential for wolves, and that California is likely to have a different experience than Oregon due to different ungulate populations
- Replace the term “models” in Item 15 with something more appropriate
- Rephrase Item 16 to reflect the current status of restrictions for human-caused mortality affecting any wolves in California

**APPENDIX A  
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Email</b>
<b>Stakeholders</b>		
Noelle Cremers	California Farm Bureau	<a href="mailto:ncremers@cfbf.com">ncremers@cfbf.com</a>
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Mark Stopher	Senior Policy Advisor – CDFW	<a href="mailto:mark.stopher@wildlife.ca.gov">mark.stopher@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Karen Kovacs	Wildlife Program Manager – Region 1; Wolf Management Planning Lead	<a href="mailto:karen.kovacs@wildlife.ca.gov">karen.kovacs@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Eric Loft	Wildlife Branch Chief	<a href="mailto:eric.loft@wildlife.ca.gov">eric.loft@wildlife.ca.gov</a>



**APPENDIX B  
PUBLIC PARTICIPANTS AND COMMENTS**

<b>Legislative Representatives</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Email</b>
Catherine Bird	Senator Ted Gaines's Office	<a href="mailto:catherine.bird@sen.ca.gov">catherine.bird@sen.ca.gov</a>
Bruce Ross	Assemblyman Brian Dahle's Office	<a href="mailto:bruce.ross@asm.ca.gov">bruce.ross@asm.ca.gov</a>

No comments were offered

## APPENDIX C - AGENDA

### PROPOSED AGENDA

Conservation Objectives Subgroup

12-3 PM May 21, 2014

Room 1341, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento

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

#### Proposed Agenda

1. Housekeeping and Introductions
2. Updates
  - a. Recent developments re: OR-7
  - b.
  - c.
3. Review/discuss/revise April 29 meeting report
4. Review/discuss Chapron paper provided May 14 for implications regarding management units and population objectives
5. Review/discuss revised operating assumption for CA wolf conservation planning
6. General discussion of elements to potentially include in California strategy
  - Potential landscape management units
  - Conservation (population) objectives
  - Phasing/timing
  - Regulatory component
7. Planning [15 minutes]
  - Review outstanding list of necessary fact-finding or other tasks

Public questions (last 10 minutes)

**APPENDIX D  
OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS FOR  
CA WOLF CONSERVATION PLANNING (05-21-2014)**

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

1. As a wolf population becomes established in CA, we can expect a continued exchange of individual animals with Oregon population
2. Net positive immigration from Oregon into California during this period
3. Management practices in Oregon, with respect to wolves will change little during this period
4. Oregon population data reflect recent annual wolf population growth in that state
  - 2010 50%
  - 2011 38%
  - 2012 58%
  - 2013 39%
5. Immigration from Idaho will become an increasingly less important contributing mechanism for growth in Oregon's wolf population over time, compared to intrinsic growth based on reproduction in Oregon wolf packs.
6. When wolf packs become established in CA their distribution will generally be based on these factors:
  1. Positively correlated with:
    1. proximity to Oregon
    2. higher wild ungulate density (particularly with respect to elk)
    3. with higher forest cover
  2. Negatively correlated with:
    1. human density
    2. domestic livestock density
    3. non-forested rangeland and intensively managed agricultural lands
    4. road density
7. Existing information is not sufficient to confidently estimate the long-term carrying capacity for wolves in CA
8. Existing information is sufficient to predict those geographic areas most likely to provide suitable habitat for wolf packs in the near term
9. Due to the absence of large refugial 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 OR or WA.
10. The extent to which wolf populations can or will establish in areas where mule deer are the primary wild ungulate prey, in CA, is unknown.
11. For the same reasons listed in #7, the wolf population is likely to be smaller, in the long-term than in Oregon or Washington
12. 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.
13. Based on the OR experience, and assumption that CA wolf population grow relatively more slowly, in the near term, the CA wolf population will likely be composed of no more than 6 successful breeding pairs.

14. Based on OR and WA experience:
  1. We should expect that successful breeding pairs will become established in southern OR before CA.
  2. It's unlikely that we will see near-term immigration into CA from NV
15. The NRM wolf population was established by translocation, which will not occur in CA. Therefore the rates of population growth in WY, MT and ID are not useful as models we should expect in CA.
16. Sport hunting and commercial trapping of wolves by private entities will likely not be lawful in the near-term in CA
- 17.