



**Meeting Report  
Wolf-Ungulate Stakeholder Subgroup  
June 18, 2014**

California Fish and Game Commission Conference Room  
1416 9<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Sacramento, CA 95814



**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

On June 18, 2014 the Wolf-Ungulate Interactions Subgroup (WUIS) of the California Wolf Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) reconvened in Sacramento. This was the fourth meeting for the WUIS, having been formed during the August 29, 2013 general SWG meeting to assist the Department with developing a consensus-driven framework of management strategies for addressing potential wolf impacts on California's native ungulate populations. The purpose of the meeting was threefold:

- Develop shared understanding of the impacts of the recent California Endangered Species Act (CESA) listing on the California Wolf Plan (CWP)
- Receive stakeholder comments on the draft CWP Wolf-Ungulate Interactions chapter
- Receive stakeholder comments on draft wolf-ungulate strategies

## **2.0 Meeting Objectives and Mechanics**

The meeting was conducted in the conference room at the California Fish and Game Commission office in Sacramento.

The agenda as initially planned included the following items:

1. Introductions and Housekeeping
2. Updates
3. Comments and corrections on meeting report for May 20, 2014
4. Comments on draft wolf-ungulate chapter
5. Review/discuss draft wolf-ungulate strategies for California
6. Discuss next steps
7. Public questions

The meeting was attended in person by the meeting facilitator Sam Magill, six stakeholders, eight CDFW staff, and one California Fish and Game Commission (FGC) staff. In addition, one stakeholder attended via conference line. Appendix A provides a list of participants, their affiliations, and their contact information.

## **3.0 Meeting Outputs**

### **Updates**

#### Implications of Wolf CESA Listing

The FGC decided at their June 4, 2014 meeting in Fortuna, to list the gray wolf as endangered under CESA. Dr. Loft explained to the stakeholders that the Department will continue developing the wolf plan and attempt to meet the deadlines for completion. The primary implication of the listing to the wolf plan is that there will be no take for depredation allowed. This corresponds with the current prohibition of take under the federal ESA. Ms. Kovacs responded to questions about the value of the planning effort in light of wolf listing by describing some potential actions that can be listed in the plan. These included requesting staffing for wolf and ungulate monitoring efforts, and for coordinating with federal agencies for improved ungulate habitat on federal lands. Mr. Sonke Mastrup from the FGC also addressed some questions from the group regarding the value of the wolf planning effort in the wake of wolf listing. Mr. Mastrup explained that the management plan is even more important because it can help to identify what recovery of the species could mean. There are many questions about where wolves belong in California, and how many constitute a viable population. Answers to those questions can be attempted in the plan. One stakeholder asked Mr. Mastrup if the FGC had obtained additional information in making their decision to list after the Department had recommended against listing. Mr. Mastrup explained that the Department recommended against listing because the law didn't accommodate wolves; although the species is clearly threatened the law was written to help recover a declining species, not one that doesn't currently exist in the state. Additional comments/questions posed by members, and the responses from Department staff and Mr. Mastrup are as follows:

- If we see problems with our ungulate populations, will we have to delist wolves to take action to resolve the problem?
  - *A listed wolf is different than a listed red-legged frog in its impacts on society. The legislature can make changes if something doesn't make sense so the plan should lay out the mechanics of how to do that.*
- Instead of a wolf population number, the plan can outline an approach to dealing with wolves.
  - *A number isn't required to delist a species. There is no way we can come up with a number that has meaning. You lay out what features to look at to determine when to change direction. If the elk crash, then we need to rethink our approach.*

### Stakeholder Assessment Process

Next, Mr. Magill informed the group about an informal survey he is conducting, in which he will be contacting SWG members to find out how the listing decision had affected their interest in participating in the stakeholder process. He has already contacted some members, and requested anyone wishing to participate to contact him.

## **Comments and corrections on meeting report for May 20, 2014**

The previous meeting report was apparently not sent to members so hard copies were provided, and Mr. Magill will send an electronic copy via email later. The group was asked to send their comments on the report to Mr. Magill by end of the day on Friday, June 20.

## **Comments on draft Wolf-ungulate chapter**

To begin this section, Department staff described changes they made to the chapter since the last version. Those included:

- Changing 3-year average deer population trends from a table to a bar graph
- Clarifying that all deer in California are subspecies of mule deer, and the Department does not manage by subspecies
- Including descriptions of land management practices such as fire suppression and its impacts on shrub species
- Creating consistency in descriptions of different habitats
- Increasing discussion about known predation of ungulates in California
- Providing some definitions of terms such as buck/doe ratios
- Providing additional detail of wolf diet at different wolf population levels, and varying percentages of deer, elk, and other prey items

In addition, Department staff presented two graphs to help inform stakeholder discussions about the chapter. No decision has been made to include the graphs *verbatim* in the text. These graphs display statewide deer and elk densities for western states with wolf populations, and are intended to show the significant difference in ungulate densities in California as compared to other western states. Ungulate density is a more relevant indicator of potential wolf occupation than ungulate abundance. WUIS members suggested that more focused ungulate densities in areas where wolves are most likely to occur would be more effective for use in the plan. Mr. Mastrup suggested that a practical strategy for the plan would be to establish a baseline of ungulate densities for the plan that can be monitored for changes upon the arrival of wolves, although parsing out what actually causes changes in ungulate populations can be extremely difficult. Additional suggestions by stakeholders and Department staff included the following:

- Include densities for ungulates for the prey selection studies presented in Table 12

- Provide information on other states' ungulate population trends where wolves occur rather than where those populations are relative to their management objectives
- Develop population objectives for California's deer and elk
- Compile historical ungulate kill data with confidence intervals for use as population minimums in specific geographic areas
- Include language about the social tolerance or intolerance of ungulates in California with respect to ungulate management objectives
- Incorporate additional information on wolf-ungulate interactions in the Mexican wolf recovery area
- Include the potential for localized negative effects on elk herds, given that most elk herds are well below objectives both in their abundance and in their distribution

This section of the meeting concluded with Dr. Loft asking the members to have a big-picture look at the chapter, and send their recommendations for anything missing by the end of the day on Monday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, and comments of a more detailed nature will be requested for the next draft.

### **Review/discuss draft wolf-ungulate strategies for California**

With the remaining time left in the meeting, the strategies document was displayed on the wall. Specific comments and questions that were posed are listed below, with Department responses in italics.

- Illegal killing is an enforcement issue
  - *That item came from Washington where some studies showed it to be a problem there*
- This group will have little sway with federal land agencies since they have no representation here
  - *The Department has made some efforts to re-engage the federal agencies*
- The U.S. Forest Service has little capacity to implement significant habitat improvements for ungulates
- There are collaborative efforts being planned with the U.S. Forest Service in the north state and they plan to hire a forest biologist
  - *We do need to increase our efforts in that regard*
- The goal and its related strategies imply that wolves take precedence over the needs of hunters but in the operating principles the goals were supposed to be coequal
  - *The goals and objectives can be wordsmithed to be less objectionable, but our mission statement says that we must conserve wildlife first, before any*

*human uses; wolves are a wildlife conservation issue so they will have to take precedence over public use and enjoyment*

- The goal, objectives, and strategies need to be more specific
  - *We have to be careful in our level of specificity in that it may trigger California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) oversight*
  - *Agree that greater specificity is needed; without sufficient specificity the plan may lack any environmental consequence*
- Why is hunting singled out in the goal? Maybe it should say manage recreational opportunities
  - *Agree and would also suggest that our level of hunting is very conservative and does not have a significant ungulate population impact*
- If ungulate numbers do go down the first thing to go will be hunter opportunity because it's the one thing you can manage
- It is this group's responsibility to develop the strategies related to ungulates, even if they go into another chapter
- The strategies should be prioritized, and the number one strategy should be habitat
  - *We should consider breaking them down in terms of land ownership because those require different strategies*

This section ended with discussion of whether the group should schedule another meeting to focus specifically on developing the relevant strategies. Dr. Loft suggested that Department staff work on restructuring the document, making certain that its strategies actually reflect the chapter.

### **Discuss next steps**

The facilitator told the group he will poll them for an appropriate next meeting date in the next few days, and the meeting concluded.

### **Action Items**

- Facilitator will resend the May 20 meeting report
- Members will provide comments on the May 20 meeting report to the facilitator by the end of day on Friday, June 20
- Members will send their questions on the CESA listing implications to facilitator by end of day on Friday, June 20
- Department will upload documents on Mexican wolves to the document library
- Members will send general comments on the draft chapter by end of day on Monday, June 23
- Facilitator will poll the group for a date and time for the next meeting

## APPENDIX A. WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation	Email
<b>Stakeholders</b>		
Rob DiPerna	Environmental Protection Information Center	<a href="mailto:rob@wildcalifornia.org">rob@wildcalifornia.org</a>
Marilyn Jasper	Sierra Club	<a href="mailto:marilyn.jasper@mlc.sierraclub.org">marilyn.jasper@mlc.sierraclub.org</a>
Randy Morrison	Mule Deer Foundation	<a href="mailto:randy@muledeer.org">randy@muledeer.org</a>
Jerry Springer	California Deer Association	<a href="mailto:jerry@westernhunter.org">jerry@westernhunter.org</a>
Bill Gaines	California Houndsmen for Conservation	<a href="mailto:billgaines1@sbcglobal.net">billgaines1@sbcglobal.net</a>
Mike Ford	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	<a href="mailto:mford@rmef.org">mford@rmef.org</a>
Kimberly Baker	Environmental Protection Information Center	<a href="mailto:kimberly@wildcalifornia.org">kimberly@wildcalifornia.org</a>
<b>California Department of Fish and Wildlife Staff</b>		
Karen Kovacs	Environmental Program Manager – Region 1	<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>
Karen Converse	Environmental Scientist – Lands Program	<a href="mailto:karen.converse@wildlife.ca.gov">karen.converse@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Mary Sommer	Environmental Scientist – Deer Program	<a href="mailto:mary.sommer@wildlife.ca.gov">mary.sommer@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Joe Hobbs	Senior Environmental Scientist – Elk Program	<a href="mailto:joe.hobbs@wildlife.ca.gov">joe.hobbs@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Mark Stopher	Senior Policy Advisor – CDFW	<a href="mailto:mark.stopher@wildlife.ca.gov">mark.stopher@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Craig Stowers	Game Program Manager	<a href="mailto:craig.stowers@wildlife.ca.gov">craig.stowers@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
Erin Reddy	Scientific Aid – Lands Program	<a href="mailto:erin.reddy@wildlife.ca.gov">erin.reddy@wildlife.ca.gov</a>
<b>California Fish and Game Commission Staff</b>		
Sonke Mastrup	Executive Director	<a href="mailto:sonke.mastrup@fgc.ca.gov">sonke.mastrup@fgc.ca.gov</a>



## **APPENDIX B – AGENDA**

Wolf-Ungulate Subgroup

1-4 PM June 18, 2014

Natural Resources Building – Fish and Game Commission conference room

1416 Ninth Street, Room 1320, Sacramento

Teleconference Line 888-895-4286

Participant Code 562227

\*Parking on the street (bring lots of quarters) or parking garages on both 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> streets between “O” and “P” streets

1. Introductions and Housekeeping (5 mins)
2. Updates (10 mins)
  - a. Briefly discuss wolf listing decision implications
  - b. Stakeholder assessment process
3. Comments and corrections on meeting report for May 20, 2014 (5 mins)
4. Comments on draft wolf-ungulate chapter (1 hr)
5. Review/discuss draft wolf-ungulate strategies for California (1 hr)
6. Discuss next steps (10 mins)
7. Public questions (10 mins)

**APPENDIX C**  
**WOLF-UNGULATE STRATEGIES FOR CALIFORNIA**

California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife  
 Draft Wolf-Ungulate Interactions Management Strategies  
 06-18-2014 Wolf-Ungulate Subgroup Meeting

This document identifies proposed objectives and strategies associated with wolf-ungulate interactions identified in Chapter 3 of the California Wolf Management Plan. The overriding goal was drafted by the Stakeholder Working Group in July, 2013, and provides the framework for the objectives and strategies identified in this document:

Goal	Objectives	Strategies
Manage native ungulate populations in the state to provide abundant prey for wolves and other predators, intrinsic enjoyment by the public, and harvest opportunities for hunters	Monitor ungulate populations in areas occupied by wolves <sup>i</sup>	
	Enhance ungulate populations wherever possible, subject to habitat limitations and landowner tolerance. <sup>ii</sup>	Improve habitat for ungulate populations <sup>iii</sup>
		Manage recreational hunting to ensure sufficient prey for viable wolf populations while maintaining hunting opportunities for hunters <sup>iv</sup>
		Reduce illegal killing of ungulate populations <sup>v</sup>
	Manage wolf-ungulate conflicts	Manage conflicts at sites with game exclusion fencing <sup>vi</sup>
		Manage conflicts with specific ungulate populations <sup>vii</sup>
	Integrate management of multiple species <sup>viii</sup>	

California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife  
Draft Wolf-Ungulate Interactions Management Strategies  
06-18-2014 Wolf-Ungulate Subgroup Meeting

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<sup>i</sup> CDFW and its cooperators already conduct surveys of annual production, recruitment, and harvest of ungulate populations in the state. These data are used to monitor population abundance or trends, and to make recommendations for hunting seasons and other management actions. Nevertheless, management of many populations would benefit from increased survey intensity to improve the precision and accuracy of information. Improvements in survey protocols may enhance efforts to assess the impacts of wolves on prey and to determine if changes in ungulate management strategies are needed.

<sup>ii</sup> Maintaining robust prey populations will result in three key benefits for wolf conservation in California: (1) providing wolves with an adequate prey base, (2) supplying hunters and recreational viewers of wildlife with continued opportunities to hunt and observe game, and (3) reducing the potential for livestock depredation by providing an alternative to domestic animals. Ungulate populations in areas occupied or likely to be occupied by wolves should be managed consistent with game management plans devised for those populations.

<sup>iii</sup> Healthy ungulate populations require adequate summer and winter habitat. Deer and elk are generally most abundant in early successional forests, but this habitat has declined in many parts of California in recent decades due to reduced timber harvest, fire exclusion, intensification of reforestation methods, development, and other causes. CDFW will continue to work with other public land agencies, private landowners, non-governmental organizations (e.g., Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation), and tribal governments to cooperatively manage forestlands and winter and summer habitat for the benefit of ungulate populations. This will include the use of appropriate management practices to improve forage quality in various habitats; management of some habitats preferentially for ungulates; reduction of road densities and off-road vehicle use in critical habitat; maintaining open habitats (e.g., meadows), winter habitats, and productive early successional habitat; improving control of noxious weeds; and protection of valuable lands through acquisitions, leases, landowner agreements, and other methods.

<sup>iv</sup> Recreational harvest levels are adjusted annually to maintain ungulate populations at desired management objectives. Harvest levels are reduced if localized ungulate populations decline due to any of a variety of factors such as severe weather, disease, overharvest, predation, or habitat loss. In order to provide adequate prey for wolves, greater restrictions on hunting may be necessary.

<sup>v</sup> Illegal killing can be an important source of mortality among elk and deer populations in California. For Washington Smith et al. (1994) recommended increased patrolling during October, November, and December, when most elk poaching occurs. They also recommended concentrating patrols within 30 miles of human population centers and in locations with high hunter and road densities because most poaching occurs in these areas.

<sup>vi</sup> Wolves could eventually be attracted to locations where fences have been built to keep ungulates off croplands and highways. If wolf disturbance at these sites proves serious, it could cause some elk to disperse into agricultural lands and highway rights-of-way. These situations will be evaluated on a case-specific basis to determine if management responses are needed and, if so, what the responses should be. In some cases, it may be desirable to develop a response plan in advance to address an anticipated conflict.

<sup>vii</sup> If CDFW determined that wolf predation was a primary limiting factor for an "at-risk" ungulate population, and the wolf population [in that wolf management zone] exceeds the delisting objectives [for that zone], CDFW would consider reducing wolf abundance in the localized area occupied by the at-risk ungulate population. For the purposes of this plan at-risk is defined as any federal or state listed ungulate population (e.g. Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep), and would also include any ungulate population which falls 25% below its population objective for two consecutive years and/or if the harvest decreases by 25% below the 10 year average harvest rate for two consecutive years. In ungulate populations without

numeric estimates or without management objectives, the Department will rely on other information to assess a decline such as sex and age ratios, hunter effort trends, and others.

<sup>viii</sup> Management of ungulate and carnivore populations should be integrated on an ecological basis. Achieving management goals for all of these species will be enhanced if the plans are considered collectively. The ecological roles of predators and prey should be integrated in these management plans. Coordination among public agencies, landowners, tribes, and non-governmental organizations is also necessary to meet management goals.

DRAFT