



Oregon Wolf Management

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, January 2016

Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan

Wolves in Oregon are managed under the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan). The Wolf Plan was originally adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) in 2005 and was updated in 2010. The original plan was a result of one of the largest public involvement processes undertaken by the Department at that time. The 2-year planning process included the following:

- Four Commission-sponsored workshops. Twenty-nine people were invited to each of these, representing a variety of public and private interests.
- Fifteen town-hall meetings held in cities across Oregon. Approximately 2,000 people attended these meetings.
- A 14-member advisory committee was established with representatives from all sides of the wolf issue. This group met thirteen times while drafting the plan.
- Approximately 6,000 written and verbal comments were received from the public.
- As a result of the extensive public review, the Commission made over 200 changes to the draft before adopting the Plan.

The current Wolf Plan can be viewed at http://www.dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/management_plan.asp

The Wolf Plan uses a three-phased approach to address both conservation and management needs as the wolf population increases. Phase 1 is the conservation phase in which actions are directed toward achieving the conservation population objective of four breeding pairs of wolves for three consecutive years. That objective was reached in January of 2015 in eastern Oregon and the east wolf management zone entered Phase 2 of the Wolf Plan. This phase calls for the evaluation of state criteria to delist wolves from the Oregon List of Endangered Species. Management actions in Phase 2 are directed at achieving the management population objective of seven breeding pairs in eastern Oregon. The third and final phase of the Wolf Plan is Phase 3 and this is known as the management phase. In this phase, management activities will be directed toward ensuring that the wolf population does not decline below Phase 2 levels and that wolves do not climb to unmanageable levels and cause conflict with other land uses. Based on current population growth predictions, Oregon wolves may enter Phase 3 of the Wolf Plan (in eastern Oregon) as early as 2017. Conservation phase management continues in the west wolf management zone.

Oregon Wolf Population

Winter wolf population counts for 2015 have not been completed at this time. However, as of July 2015 there were 16 known packs or groups of wolves in Oregon and a known adult population of 84 wolves (Figure 1). At the end of 2014 there were more than 81 known wolves among 10 packs in Oregon and nine of those were breeding pairs. Annual winter counts of wolves were initiated by the Department in 2009 and Oregon's wolf population increased in all years since with a mean population growth rate of 1.43 (± 0.15 SD).

Wolves are rapidly expanding their range in Oregon. Approximately 42% of Oregon is considered potential wolf range; wolves now occupy about 12.4% of this area (Figure 2). Wolf collar data shows that wolves move freely between the eastern and western management zones (Figure 3) and that they traverse the entirety of the Cascades within western Oregon. Wolves have proved capable of crossing all types of potential barriers in Oregon (e.g. rivers, highways).

Delisting from Oregon ESA

Oregon wolves were listed as endangered under the Oregon Endangered Species Act when it was created by the Oregon Legislature in 1987. The Wolf Plan contains a conservation population objective of four breeding pairs for three consecutive years in eastern Oregon, based in part on the requirements for delisting the species under the Act. The conservation population objective was achieved in January of 2015 and as called for in the Wolf Plan, the Department initiated a biological status review for wolves in Oregon. The Department's biological status review found:

- Wolves are represented over a large geographic area of Oregon, are connected to other populations, and nothing is preventing them from occupying additional portions of Oregon.
- The wolf population is projected to continue to increase. The overall probability of extinction is very low and genetic variation is high.
- Wolf habitat in Oregon is stable and wolf range is expanding.
- Over-utilization of wolves is unlikely as the Wolf Plan continues to provide protections for wolves and any commercial, recreational or scientific take in the future is regulated by the Commission.
- The Wolf Plan ensures protection of wolves in the future, regardless of ESA status.

Delisting a species from Oregon ESA requires a public rulemaking decision by the Commission on the basis of scientific information and other biological data to evaluate the biological status. Specifically, as outlined in Oregon ESA statute, if the Commission makes the following five determinations it may remove the species from the endangered species list:

1. The species is not now (and is not likely in the foreseeable future to be) in danger of extinction in any significant portion of its range in Oregon or in danger of becoming endangered; and
2. The species' natural reproductive potential is not in danger of failure due to limited population numbers, disease, predation, or other natural or human-related factors affecting its continued existence; and
3. Most populations are not undergoing imminent or active deterioration of range or primary habitat; and
4. Over-utilization of the species or its habitat for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes is not occurring or likely to occur; and
5. Existing state or federal programs or regulations are adequate to protect the species and its habitat.

After review of the biological status of wolves in Oregon the Commission approved the delisting of wolves on November 9, 2015. Supporting information related to the Commission's delisting decision is available at: http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/15/11_november/index.asp

On December 31, 2015 a petition for judicial review challenging the Commission's decision was filed in the Oregon Court of Appeals by three environmental groups; Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, and Oregon Wild.

Effects of Delisting

Delisting resulted in no immediate changes to wolf management in Oregon and wolves remain protected in all of the state. Their protection is not based on ESA listing status but on the Wolf Plan and its associated technical rules. The Department is currently implementing Phase 2 of the Wolf Plan in eastern Oregon. Intensive monitoring of Oregon's wolves will continue and the 2015 year-end count information is generally completed by March 2016. Other management activities continue in the western management zone, unchanged per the existing Wolf Plan.

The Wolf Plan continues to emphasize non-lethal protective measures to deal with wolf-livestock conflict and allows no general season sport hunting or trapping of wolves. In Phase 3 of the Wolf Plan, controlled take of wolves could be allowed in some situations of chronic livestock depredation or wolf-caused declines of prey populations.

Wolves west of Oregon highways 395-78-95 in Oregon are still listed as federally endangered and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Figure 4).

Plan Evaluation

The Commission requires periodic evaluation to formally assess the effectiveness of the Wolf Plan's implementation. The results of any evaluation could include rulemaking by the Commission to amend or update the Plan and the next review of the Wolf Plan is scheduled to begin in early 2016. Though the level of detail of the upcoming Wolf Plan review is unknown at this time, the Commission did express a strong commitment to maintaining a Wolf Plan with a conservation focus.

To complete the evaluation, the Department will conduct an internal review of the Wolf Plan and then will meet with stakeholder groups to receive specific input on the plan's implementation and opportunities for improvement. The public will also have full opportunity to provide input to the Commission through the normal public hearing process.

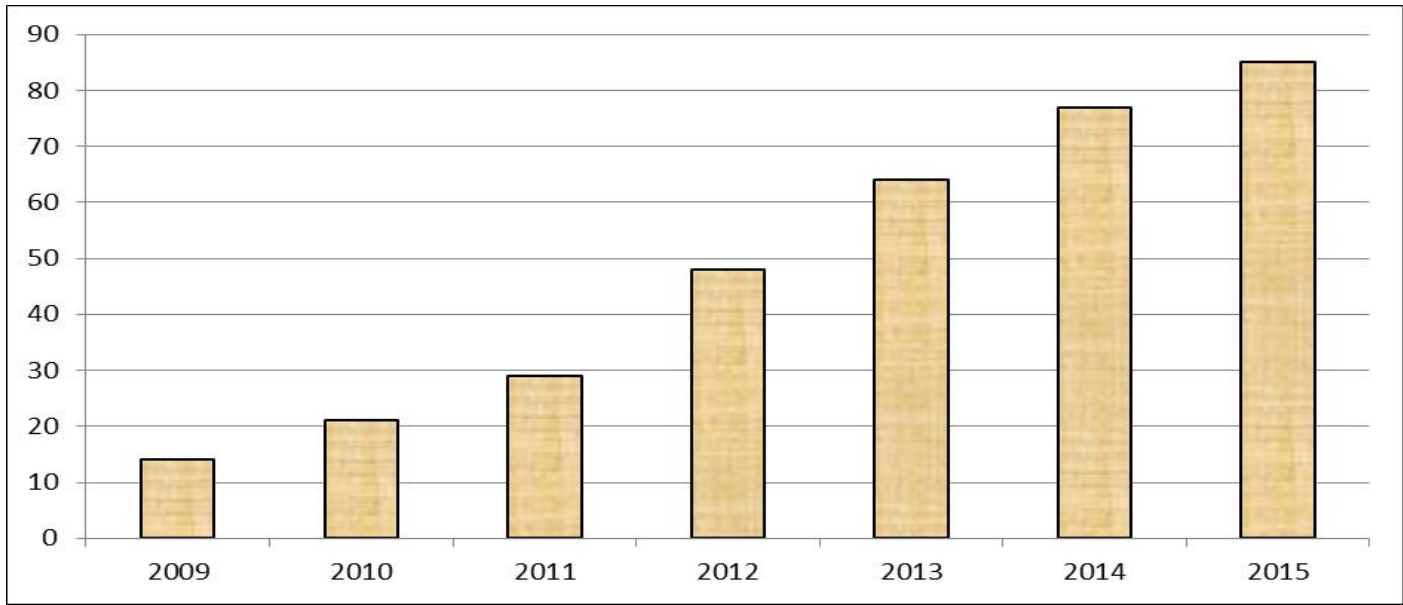


Figure 1. Oregon minimum wolf population growth from 2009 through 7/2015 (2015 population does not include pups of the year)



Figure 2. Areas of known wolf activity through November, 2015

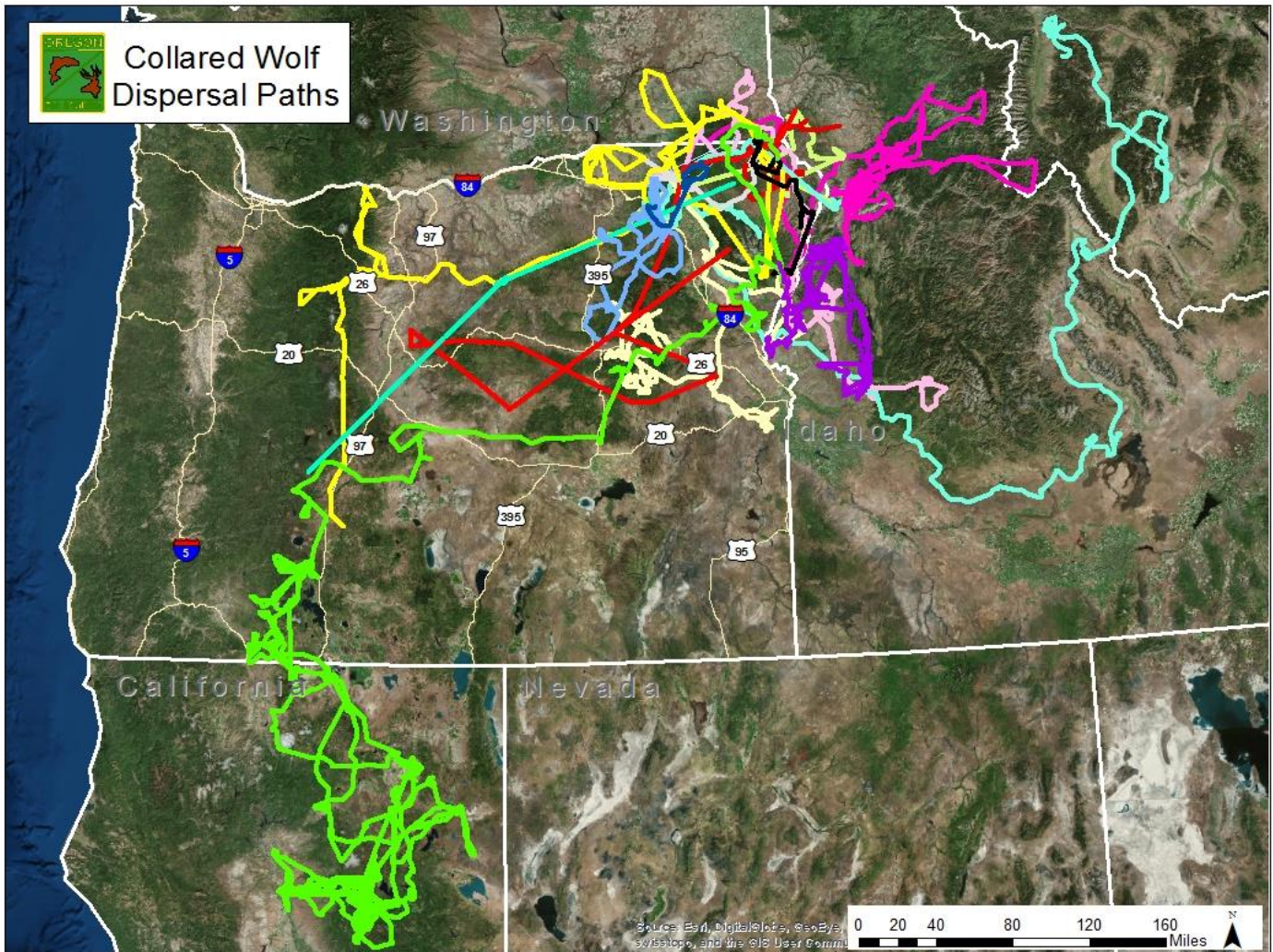


Figure 3. Pathways of dispersing collared wolves in Oregon 2010 through November 2015

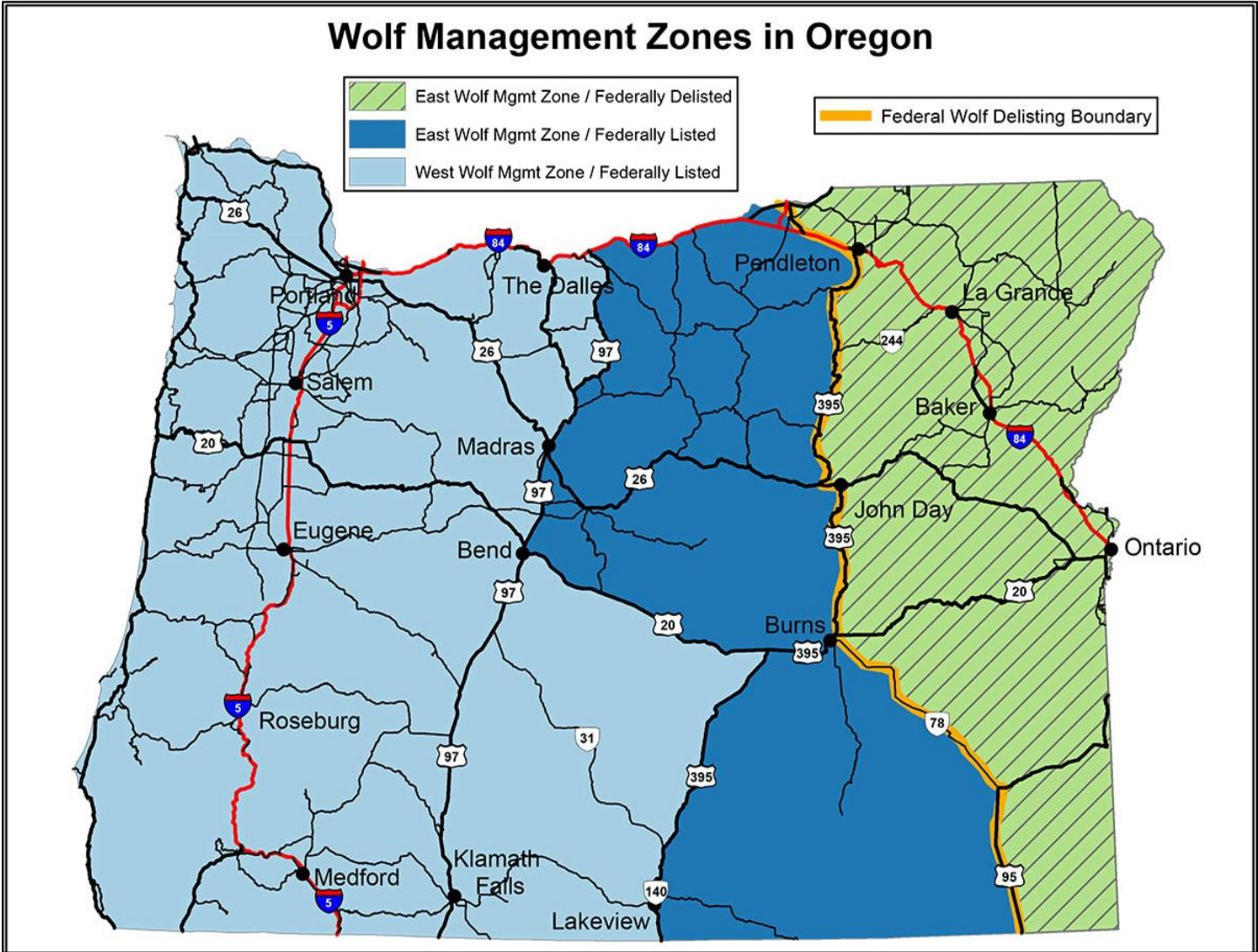


Figure 4. Wolf management zones in Oregon