



COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

Board of Supervisors

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April 3, 2025

Charlton (Chuck) Bonham
Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

Subject: Gray Wolves in Siskiyou County

Dear Director Bonham:

The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors is writing to express our growing concern about the significant and ongoing impacts that the presence of Gray Wolves is having on our local agricultural community, particularly regarding livestock predation. Since 2021, there have been over 78 confirmed kills and 9 probable kills of livestock in Siskiyou County. Some estimates suggest the actual number of livestock lost may be up to eight times higher than the carcasses that have been found and identified. This discrepancy is due to the challenges of locating carcasses, especially in areas with dense vegetation where kills frequently occur, as well as the loss of evidence over time when livestock are not immediately discovered by producers. As a result, it's possible that wolves are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of livestock in our county. Wolves often target ranch operations in areas that offer cover, water, and an abundance of prey. For example, one ranch in Shasta Valley has reported more than 40 confirmed depredations.

The presence of wolves near or among livestock not only leads to direct kills but also causes significant stress to the animals. This stress reduces pregnancy rates and negatively impacts weight gain in livestock, particularly beef cattle, severely affecting the economic viability of our ranchers. In Siskiyou County and throughout northern California, wolves are preying on livestock at much higher rates than in other states because our region lacks sufficient ungulates to support the wolf population, forcing wolves to rely on livestock as their primary food source. Not only are ungulate numbers not enough to support wolves, available evidence also does not suggest that ungulate numbers are increasing at a rate that would adequately support wolves.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), through its Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves, has committed to continuing the collection of relevant data and applying it adaptively in wolf conservation efforts, and according to its Plan, the department shall conduct a status review once the number of successful breeding pairs reaches six pairs for

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District 4

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District 5

two consecutive years.¹ If the department hasn't done so already, and given the challenges our community is facing, we request that CDFW accelerate the assessment of the wolf population, particularly in Siskiyou County, and the ongoing impacts on agriculture. As part of this review, we propose that CDFW produce an annual Wolf Report that specifically addresses issues related to livestock predation, management strategies, and the effectiveness of current mitigation practices. The Report must also assess an accurate number of ungulates available to provide a food source for wolves. Siskiyou County has been proactive in trying to address issues faced by our ranchers by contracting a wolf liaison who, alongside county trappers, assists the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in identifying wolf-livestock interactions and investigating carcasses suspected to be killed by wolves. Livestock producers, our wolf liaison, and our county trappers must be included in the development of future Wolf Reports.

We urge CDFW to implement more effective measures to minimize wolf-livestock conflicts, particularly as the wolf population continues to grow. It is essential that these measures research into conflict mitigation strategies, enhanced support for livestock producers, and immediate attention to strategies for minimizing interactions between wolves and livestock. In addition to these efforts, Siskiyou County believes that there is an urgent need to expand the department's livestock compensation program. This must be a dedicated program to compensate livestock owners who suffer losses due to wolf predation. This fund should be streamlined for quick access and compensation, and it must be allocated a minimum of \$10 million annually, covering not only the replacement value of the livestock but also the potential future earnings that are lost when breeding animals are killed.

We also recommend that CDFW take immediate action to provide real-time data on wolf locations throughout California. This would allow livestock owners to deploy deterrent measures more effectively and prevent further conflicts. Furthermore, CDFW should look to other states with established wolf populations that have successfully implemented reasonable and responsible management practices, including depredation management measures, to protect livestock. We believe these strategies should be considered and implemented in California as part of a comprehensive approach to managing wolf populations.

The anticipated growth of the gray wolf population in California will undoubtedly lead to an increase in human-wolf interactions, particularly in areas where wolves are in proximity to livestock.² While wild wolves generally fear people and attacks on humans are exceedingly rare, the likelihood of negative interactions will increase as wolves become more established near human activity. These interactions are of particular concern in rural areas like Siskiyou County, where livestock owners face ongoing predation issues.

The presence of wolves in areas with high human activity, such as public lands used for recreation and livestock grazing, further exacerbates the potential for conflict. Wolves, being highly territorial, may exhibit aggressive behavior toward domestic dogs, which are often employed in herding or as livestock protection dogs. As these interactions become more

¹ California Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves in California Part II at page 175.


² California Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves in California Part II at page 43.

frequent, it is essential that CDFW continue to monitor wolf populations and behavior, especially in regions like Siskiyou County, where these conflicts are already becoming a significant concern. Effective management strategies will be vital as the wolf population expands.

We appreciate your attention to this critical matter and request that CDFW take the necessary steps to address the challenges faced by Siskiyou County's ranching community. The growing number of wolves continues to present challenges, and it is imperative that the department takes swift and decisive action to protect agricultural livelihoods.

Sincerely,

Signed by:


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Nancy Ogren
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: Senator Megan Dahle
Assemblymember Heather Hadwick
Rural County Representatives of California
California State Association of Counties
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lang
Congressman Doug LaMalfa
Siskiyou County Cattlemen's Association
Siskiyou County Farm Bureau
California Cattlemen's Association
Governor Gavin Newsom
Secretary Wade Crowfoot