WDFW Plans to Eliminate Wolf Pack to End Attacks

Local News

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Olympia, WA - In response to ongoing attacks on livestock by a wolf pack in Northeast Washington that appears to be preying exclusively on cattle, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) today announced it plans to eliminate the pack and lay a foundation for sustainable, long-term wolf recovery in the region.WDFW Director Phil Anderson said the plan has the support of key conservation interests and livestock operators. Two organizations that participated in developing the state's 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan - Conservation Northwest and the Washington Cattlemen's Association - joined the department in issuing a statement explaining their positions. The full statement is available at http://wdfw.wa.gov/news/attach/sep2112a_01.pdf Anderson said two WDFW teams were in the field Friday with the goal of killing the members of the Wedge Pack, a group of at least eight wolves whose range includes a remote, roughly triangular area of northern Stevens County bordered by Canada and the Columbia and Kettle rivers.

Anderson said WDFW marksmen would hunt the wolves from the ground and, if those efforts are not successful, might use helicopters to increase the effectiveness of their efforts. WDFW is consulting with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services office, the Stevens County Sheriff's Office and independent wildlife biologists with extensive experience with wolf management in other Western states.The Wedge Pack is believed to have killed or injured at least 15 cattle from the Diamond M herd, which grazes in a large area near the Canadian border. Attacks have become increasingly frequent since July, continuing even after WDFW staff killed a non-breeding member of the pack in early August. Since then, Anderson said, WDFW wildlife specialists and wolf experts from other states believe the Wedge wolves have become dependent on cattle as their primary food source. "Once wolves become habituated to livestock as their primary food source, all of the wolf experts we've talked to agree that we have no alternative but to remove the entire pack," Anderson said. "By doing that, we will preserve the opportunity for the recovery of gray wolves in balance with viable livestock operations."Jack Field, Executive Vice President of the Washington Cattlemen's Association, said, "We understand that as wolves re-populate the state there will be conflicts with livestock. We also understand that we need to work with WDFW to find solutions, including the use of non-lethal measures, in order to minimize losses for producers, but we need everyone else to understand that managing and killing wolves that cause problems is an important part of a healthy co-existence."Conservation Northwest Executive Director Mitch Friedman said, "As difficult as this situation with the Wedge Pack is to accept on a personal level, we understand and agree that pack removal is the right action at this point. We have been strong advocates for exhausting all non-lethal means possible to avoid this situation and are extremely disappointed that it has come to this." Friedman expressed a strong desire for the department and ranchers in areas with wolves to work together to avoid a repeat of this situation. "There has to be a commitment on the part of all sides to allow wolves to occupy the landscape while protecting the rancher's livelihood and maintain their ability to raise cattle," he said.Field said the Cattlemen's Association is encouraging landowners to enter into cooperative management agreements with WDFW that specify non-lethal measures that a livestock operator will use to minimize wolf-livestock conflict.Anderson said the management

agreements would provide cost-share funding for such measures and could include "caught in the act" kill permits to enable livestock operators in Eastern Washington to protect their livestock. The department will continue to offer compensation to ranchers for wolf-caused livestock losses, he said. "These agreements are necessary to improve cooperation between the department and livestock operators to help address the problems caused by wolves," said Field.