



March 25, 2013

Oregon Senate Environment & Natural Resources Committee
Informational Meeting: Update on Wolf Management in Oregon
Testimony of Center for Biological Diversity

Senator Dingfelder and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amaroq Weiss and I am the West Coast Wolf Organizer for the Center for Biological Diversity, a conservation organization that advocates for endangered species. We represent more than half a million members and supporters nationwide, nearly 12,000 of which reside in Oregon.

On behalf of my organization and the 500,000 people behind me, we support the recovery of wolves in Oregon and strong science-based management to help livestock operators reduce the risk of livestock loss.

Since I have not recently testified here, I will take a moment to elaborate on my background and what brings me here today. Since 1997, I have worked on wolf conservation issues in Alaska, the northern Rockies, the Southwestern U.S. and the Pacific West. My focus is on wolf conservation policy and its implementation.

I am here as a representative of the Center for Biological Diversity, but also because, out of all the people testifying today, I am the only one who was appointed by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2003 to be a stakeholder representative on the Wolf Advisory Committee that assisted the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in crafting the State's wolf plan. Like all of the 14 appointed stakeholder representatives in that process, I invested a substantial amount of time, including hundreds of hours of meetings, research, reading, writing, listening and negotiations. We worked hard.

The plan that was ultimately crafted represented a social and political compromise. It set extremely low minimum population recovery goals, and conservationists compromised on things that touched their core values. A strictly scientifically-based plan would have provided much stronger protections for the wolf. The Cattlemen's Association, which was part of the Wolf Advisory Committee, never signed onto the Plan, and from the moment it was adopted, they have fought nonstop against the Plan.

The wolf issues arrived in Oregon back in 1999, when the first Idaho wolf crossed the border. State officials here didn't even realize the gray wolf was on Oregon's endangered species list, and requested the federal government capture the wolf and take her back to Idaho.

By 2003, all that had changed. Three more wolves had crossed into Oregon and all of them ended up dead, one struck by a car, the other two illegally shot. The Commission was, by then, aware of the State's obligations to protect a returning native endangered species, and public support for conserving wolves was overwhelming. A 1999 public survey conducted by the professional polling firm of Davis & Hibbitts revealed that 70% of Oregonians were in favor of wolves returning to the state.

Public opinion on this subject has not wavered. In 2010, more than 20,000 public comments were submitted to the Commission during a five-year review of the state wolf Plan. More than 90% of the commenters indicated that they wanted *stronger* protections for wolves.

The will of the people to preserve and protect the wolf can be accomplished but, at the same time, with science-based techniques, the cattlemen's interests can also be protected. We want livestock-producers to get help in doing so. We realize there may always be some loss, but it's important to keep the numbers in perspective.

The livestock industry in Oregon includes over 1.3 million cattle. In the last year for which we have statistics, over 55,000 were lost to weather, disease, and human thieves. Four were lost to wolves. The answer to keeping these numbers low is not to kill an endangered species, but to implement conflict-prevention methods. And, the State already has programs for preventing conflict, plus a compensation program and tax credits.

While wolves remained endangered, the state wolf Plan contemplated killing wolves as a conflict-management tool but only as an option of last resort. Instead, we have seen the Department come under political pressure to move quickly to kill wolves in direct violation of the spirit of the wolf plan and the letter of the law. This resulted in our filing a legal challenge two years ago.

In that time, due to a judge's order, no wolves have been killed by agency staff as a means to resolve conflict, and the sky hasn't fallen. Quite the contrary, during this time, the Department, conservation organizations and livestock-producers have worked together to use non-lethal, conflict-prevention techniques. The wolf population has increased, while at the same time the evidence shows that wolf-livestock conflicts have dramatically decreased.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer our perspective. My fellow panelists will elaborate on the conservation-oriented, proactive approach to coexisting with wolves that we and the vast majority of Oregonians desire.

Sincerely,

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