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The Challenge of Wolf-Livestock Conflict

In light of the recent conflict that resulted in the killing of members of the Profanity Peak wolf family in NE Washington, many have wondered why I choose to serve on the Washington Wolf Advisory Group (WAG). Surely the executive director of an organization that provides a safe haven for wolves wouldn't be part of a group that approved a lethal take protocol- how is that possible? To answer that complex question, we need to briefly look at how we got where we are today in Washington State.

Wolf Haven's mission for the last 35 years is simple and straight forward- to conserve and protect wolves and their habitat. The work to accomplish that mission is FAR from simple or straightforward. For many years Wolf Haven has focused on providing lifetime sanctuary for wolves needing a home while providing general education programs for all ages on wolf ecology and biology. We have continued to support wolf research in the wild and host classes for wildlife biologists and students.

When the first wolves began to naturally disperse into Washington from B.C. and adjacent states, our conservation work increased dramatically. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) needed to develop a WA Wolf Conservation and Management Plan to guide the recovery of wolves in our state. They selected 18 interested parties from around the state representing the diverse values, cultures and geography found in Washington State. Wolf Haven served for over 4 years on the initial WA Wolf Working Group and in December of 2011, with a little over 30 wolves in the wild in this state, the Plan was approved by the commission. The Plan states the following goals for wolf recovery:

- 1.) Restore the wolf population in Washington to self-sustaining size and geographic distribution that will result in wolves having a high probability of persisting in the state for the foreseeable future
- 2.) Manage wolf-livestock conflicts in a way that minimizes livestock losses, while at the same time not negatively impacting the recovery or long-term perpetuation of a sustainable wolf population.
- 3.) Maintain healthy and robust ungulate populations in the state that provide abundant prey for wolves and other predators as well as ample harvest opportunities for hunters.
- 4.) Develop public understanding of the conservation and management needs of wolves in Washington, thereby promoting the public's coexistence with the species.

In 2013 WDFW appointed a WA Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) – a group of 9 stakeholders, some from the original WA Wolf Working Group, to advise WDFW in the implementation of the Plan. Wolf Haven once again offered to be a voice for wolves and we were selected to serve on the original WAG. Due to conflicts with wolves and livestock, and the killing of wolves by authorities along with additional killing of wolves through poaching, the conflict between stakeholders was intense and building. With declining public support, an increase in illegal poaching and a stalemate within the WAG members, WDFW commissioned an international conservation conflict transformation specialist (Francine Madden) in early 2015 to assess the ongoing public divisiveness about wolves and wolf management. The WAG was restructured to an 18-member group consisting of conservationists, environmentalists, ranchers and hunters. Once again Wolf Haven agreed to serve in order to be a voice for wolves. The WAG created the following mission:

To promote equitable, inclusive, and respectful dialogue and decision-making among diverse people to foster durable peace by transforming the root causes of social conflict and providing high quality recommendations on wolf recovery, conservation, and management.

- **READ [People and Wolves in Washington: Stakeholder Conflict Assessment and Recommendations for Conflict Transformation](#) -**

The first meetings of the newly formed WAG focused on learning about the values and needs of each stakeholder group, exploring conflict deterrence measures and making sure tools were available to prevent conflict with wolves. There have been huge strides made in getting preventative measures on the ground in rural communities.

WDFW is responsible for restoring the wolf population in Washington while managing wolf-livestock conflicts in a way that minimizes livestock losses. WDFW already had the legal authority to kill wolves if they deemed it necessary, and they were already working under a lethal take protocol. The WAG was asked to review that protocol and come to agreement on when lethal could be considered. The new protocol developed by the WAG and approved by WDFW is better than the one that previously existed. The wolf advocates on the WAG reached out to other environmental groups to get their input on the protocol and most of their concerns were included in the final protocol. It will be reevaluated at the end of the grazing season.

I work for a sanctuary where we examine every action or procedure to ensure that it best serves the animals in our care. Our entire philosophy follows an animal-centric rather than a human-centered approach. It was incredibly hard to be part of a lethal take protocol discussion. Killing wolves is counter to everything we believe. We could have stayed safely in our sanctuary and not engaged in these painful discussions but that would not have been in the best interest of wolves. Who better to sit at the table to be a voice for wolves than someone who cares so deeply about them? What better organization than one whose sole purpose is the welfare of wolves?

Wolf Haven has participated as a captive breeding facility for red and Mexican wolves for over two decades. If we have learned one thing from these programs it is that the only path to coexistence is by working with the people who are impacted by wolves, and even more so, those who are afraid they will be impacted in a negative way.

We are committed to the WA Wolf Advisory Group process, and I hope that I will have the privilege to continue to serve on the WAG. It is an intelligent, thoughtful, hardworking group of people who give their time in partnership with the dedicated professionals at WDFW. WAG meetings are open to the public and always have been. Several of our staff and volunteers have attended the meetings. Together we are learning how to deal with human wildlife conflict in a way that builds relationships and opens space for developing solutions that will work for our state. We come from different values, cultures and locations, but we all call Washington our home. There will be many tough days ahead as we examine the Profanity Peak case and work to prevent this from occurring again. I am convinced that Washington can have vibrant agricultural communities and wolves can thrive on the landscape. It won't be easy, but we are in it for the long run.

Diane Gallegos, executive director, Wolf Haven International

