

Wolves and Forestry

Wildlife in Managed Forests: Reference Series

Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) are large canines that vary in color from white-gray to brown, black, cream, tawny and white. As adults, they generally weigh 70 to 120 pounds, with females averaging 75 pounds. Wolf packs are complex social structures, usually consisting of a breeding pair and their offspring from one or more years. Wolves are native to Oregon, but were extirpated in the early 1900s. The wolves in Oregon now are descendants of wolves from Canada that immigrated into Montana in the 1980s, and that were reintroduced in Idaho and Wyoming in the mid-1990s. Wolves are more common in the forests of northeastern Oregon, but are also present in areas of the East Cascades ecoregion.

WHY ARE WOLVES IMPORTANT?

Wolves are a keystone species, meaning their presence influences many other species and the ecosystem as a whole. Gray wolves are apex predators and prey on a variety of animals, with ungulates such as elk and deer making up most of their diet. In other areas where wolves occur, evidence suggests that wolves help control ungulate populations and allow vegetation to regrow. The presence of wolves may also help balance populations of smaller carnivores and relieve pressure on small mammal and bird populations.

WHAT ABOUT WOLVES AND FORESTRY?

In general, wolves are compatible with most contemporary forest management activities. Forestry operations that enhance habitat for elk and deer are beneficial to wolves. Wolves are highly mobile, and regularly move throughout their home range. They are sensitive to forest management during denning season, when pups are not yet mobile (April - June). Forest management activities that benefit wolves include:

- maintaining forests as forests
- protecting meadows and forest openings that wolves may use during breeding season
- maintaining forests for use by ungulate species
- minimizing forest activities near active den and rendezvous sites during the breeding season
- reporting wolf sign or sightings to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF WOLVES IN OREGON?

According to the ODFW Oregon Conservation and Management 2024 Annual Report, the minimum known count of wolves in Oregon was 204 wolves. This is a 15% increase from the population in 2023. Currently, wolves are protected as a special status game mammal statewide, and animals west of Highways 395, 78, and 95 are listed as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Management of wolves in Oregon is guided by the Wolf Plan.



Rogue Pack OR7 male. Photo by USFWS.



Rogue Pack pups in downed wood. Photo by USFWS.



Rogue Pack pups on logging road. Photo by USFWS.

WHAT ARE SOME THREATS TO WOLVES?

- **habitat loss:** Forest conversion to urban landscapes and major highways reduces and fragments wolf habitat.
- **illegal killing:** It is illegal to hunt wolves in Oregon. Report any suspected illegal taking of wolves to the Oregon State Police (OSP) at 800-452-7888.
- **conflict with livestock:** Wolves can be lethally removed for chronic livestock depredation. Producers can implement measures to reduce the vulnerability of their livestock grazed on large forest pastures.
- **introduced diseases:** Parvovirus is a disease that poses risk to wolves. Wolf pups are particularly susceptible.

WHAT DO I DO IF I SEE A WOLF?

Wolves are likely to flee if encountered by humans. However, if you see a wolf, do the following:

- remain calm. Use a loud and firm voice to encourage the wolf to leave.
- move away calmly and slowly, facing the animal.
- allow the wolf a way to escape.
- do not try to feed or catch a wolf.
- pick up small children, while maintaining eye contact.
- leash and keep pets close.
- if the wolf does approach, raise your arms above your head and look as big as possible. Shout and throw any available objects, picking them up while maintaining eye contact.
- report all wolf sightings and encounters to ODFW.

HOW DO I IDENTIFY WOLF TRACKS?

Wolf tracks can be difficult to identify because they can be confused with other species such as coyote, domestic dog or mountain lion. The photo below (from ODFW) shows a wolf print. Note the size: more than 4 inches long. Tips for identifying wolf prints include:

- claws evident
- general oval shape
- track is longer than wide
- four symmetrical toes
- single lobe on the front of the main foot pad

For more information on track identification:

https://dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/docs/Wolf_track_identification.pdf.



Silver Lake wolves in open canopy. Photo by USFWS.



Walla Walla wolf in front of log pile. Photo by ODFW.

SOURCES & MORE INFORMATION

www.odfw.com/wolves

- Oregon distribution
- Gray wolf ID quiz
- Report wolf sightings
- Wolf and track photos
- Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (2019 Wolf Plan)
- 2024 Annual Report

<https://www.wolf.org>

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