

Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management 2024 Annual Report



This report to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission presents information on the status, distribution, and management of wolves in the State of Oregon from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conservation and management of wolves in Oregon is guided by the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan). The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) annually reviews the work of the wolf program, gray wolf population status, and livestock damage management activities to inform its adaptive management under the Wolf Plan.

In 2024 wolves continue to be protected as a special status game mammal statewide. Wolves west of Highways 395/78/95 are listed under the federal endangered species act (ESA) making the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) responsible for management decisions regarding harassment and take in that area.

The department monitors the wolf population to determine the number of breeding pairs of wolves in each of two wolf management zones, and Wolf Plan implementation is then based on that data. Wolves in the West Wolf Management Zone (WMZ) reached the conservation objective of four breeding pairs and the minimum management objective of seven breeding pairs. If seven breeding pairs are documented at the end of 2025 and 2026, the West Wolf Management Zone (WMZ) will move directly into Phase III of the Wolf Plan. The wolf population in the East WMZ continued to exceed the Wolf Plan minimum management objective of seven breeding pairs, and these wolves continue to be managed under Phase III of the Wolf Plan.

The minimum known count of wolves in Oregon at the end of 2024 was 204 wolves, an increase of 15% over 2023. Twenty-five packs were documented, and 17 of those packs met the criteria as breeding pairs. In addition, 18 groups of two or three wolves were identified, but did not meet the definition of a pack. Wolves continued to expand westward in Oregon with five new packs in the West WMZ. Twenty-six wolf mortalities were documented during the year, including 22 that were human-caused.

The department monitored 47 radio-collared wolves, including 23 that were captured and radio-collared during 2024. By year's end, 28 of these wolves were still being actively monitored (14% of the minimum wolf count), while contact with the rest of the collars was lost due to collar failure, wolf death, or dispersal to other states.

There were 69 confirmed events of livestock depredation during 2024 which was a slight decrease from 73 in 2023. Consistent with the Wolf Plan, livestock producers implemented non-lethal measures to minimize depredation prior to any department approval of wolf lethal removal. Eleven wolves were lethally removed in response to chronic depredation in the East WMZ in 2024. In addition, three wolves were lawfully killed by livestock producers when they were caught in the act of attacking their livestock.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture's (ODA) compensation program awarded grants totaling \$789,565 to 13 counties in 2024, up from \$477,661 in 2023. The majority of the funds (61%) were used for non-lethal preventative measures to reduce depredation, and all requests for compensation of confirmed and probable depredations were granted in full.

OREGON WOLF PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Regulatory Status

Federal Status: In February 2024, the USFWS announced a not-warranted finding for two petitions to list gray wolves under the federal Endangered Species Act in the Northern Rocky Mountains and the Western United States. The result of that finding did not change the federal legal status of gray wolves.

Wolves west of Highways 395/78/95 in Oregon remained listed under the federal ESA during 2024. In that portion of Oregon, the USFWS made all management decisions regarding harassment and take of wolves and collaborated on monitoring and non-lethal response to depredation. In the same area, the department implemented the Wolf Plan within the sideboards of federal ESA regulations and under the guidance of the Federal/State Coordination Strategy.

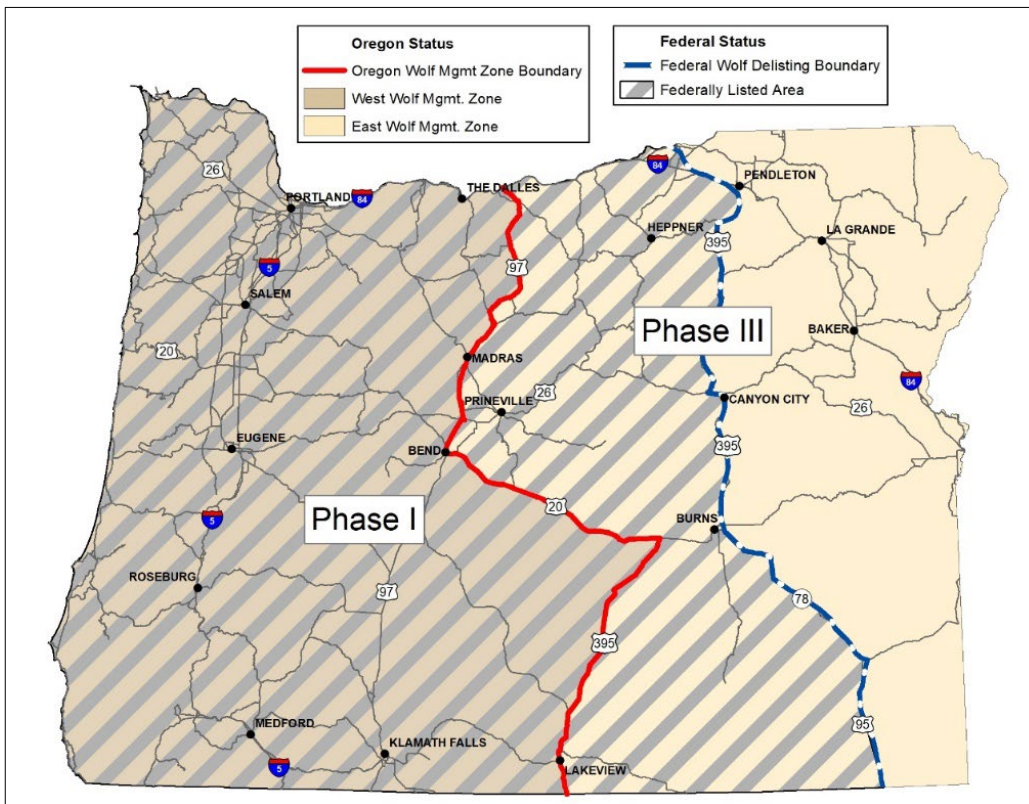


Figure 1. Wolf Management Zones in Oregon during 2024.

State Status: Wolves are protected statewide as a special status game mammal and are managed by the Wolf Plan guidelines and associated rules for each Wolf Management Zone Phase (Figure 1). Wolves in the West WMZ are managed under the more protective Phase I rules until their population reaches a minimum of four breeding pairs for three consecutive years. A **breeding pair** is defined as an adult male and adult female with at least two pups that survived to December 31 of the year of their birth. Seven packs counted as breeding pairs in the West WMZ in 2024. If at least seven breeding pairs are documented at the end of 2025 and 2026, the Phase I conservation objective and the Phase II management objective will be reached and the West WMZ will move into Phase III, skipping Phase II.

Wolves in the East WMZ continued to exceed the Wolf Plan management minimum population objective of seven breeding pairs for three consecutive years (the criteria for moving into Phase III). As such, wolves in the East WMZ continue to be managed under Phase III which focuses on the conservation of wolves while allowing more flexibility to address wolf conflict. This includes continuing to emphasize the use of non-lethal deterrents to reduce livestock depredation and the use of lethal removal in certain situations where federally delisted. The department continued to focus attention on addressing wolf-livestock conflict, reducing illegal take, and improving wolf population monitoring statewide.

Population Status

Per the Wolf Plan, the wolf population is monitored by counting each wolf in the Phase I area and at the pack level in the Phase III area. Until a population model is developed and validated for Oregon, the department provides a minimum known number of all wolves present in Oregon at the end of each year. This time- and staff-intensive effort is a direct count of wolves, not an estimate. These counts are conducted in the winter and not all wolves are located, so the actual number of wolves in Oregon is higher than this minimum count. The minimum known wolf count at the end of 2024 was 204, an increase of 15% over 2023 (Figure 2).

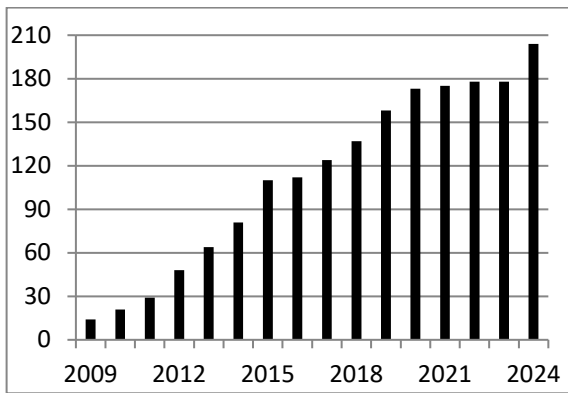


Figure 2. Minimum wolf count in Oregon (2009-2024).

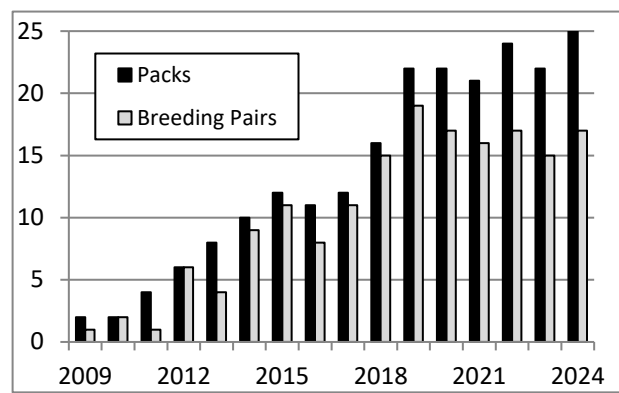


Figure 3. Number of packs and breeding pairs in Oregon (2009-2024).

For monitoring purposes, a **pack** is defined as four or more wolves traveling together in winter. Twenty-five packs were documented at the end of 2024 (Figure 3), with a mean pack size of six wolves (range 4 to 11). In addition, 18 groups of two or three wolves were identified. Throughout this report, **group** is used to denote two or more wolves traveling together. Reproduction was documented in 30 packs or pairs. At the end of 2024, 17 packs were documented as successful breeding pairs, up from 15 in 2023.

Distribution: Areas of Known Wolf Activity (AKWA) show where an individual or group of wolves have been repeatedly documented (Figure 4). When resident wolf activity is observed, the department delineates AKWA boundaries using actual location data points, but in situations where wolves are resident but location data is limited, the department uses a fixed circle representing an average home range size to show an estimated use area. When multiple resident packs or individuals overlap, those individual AKWAs are combined into one large AKWA to delineate contiguous areas of wolf activity.

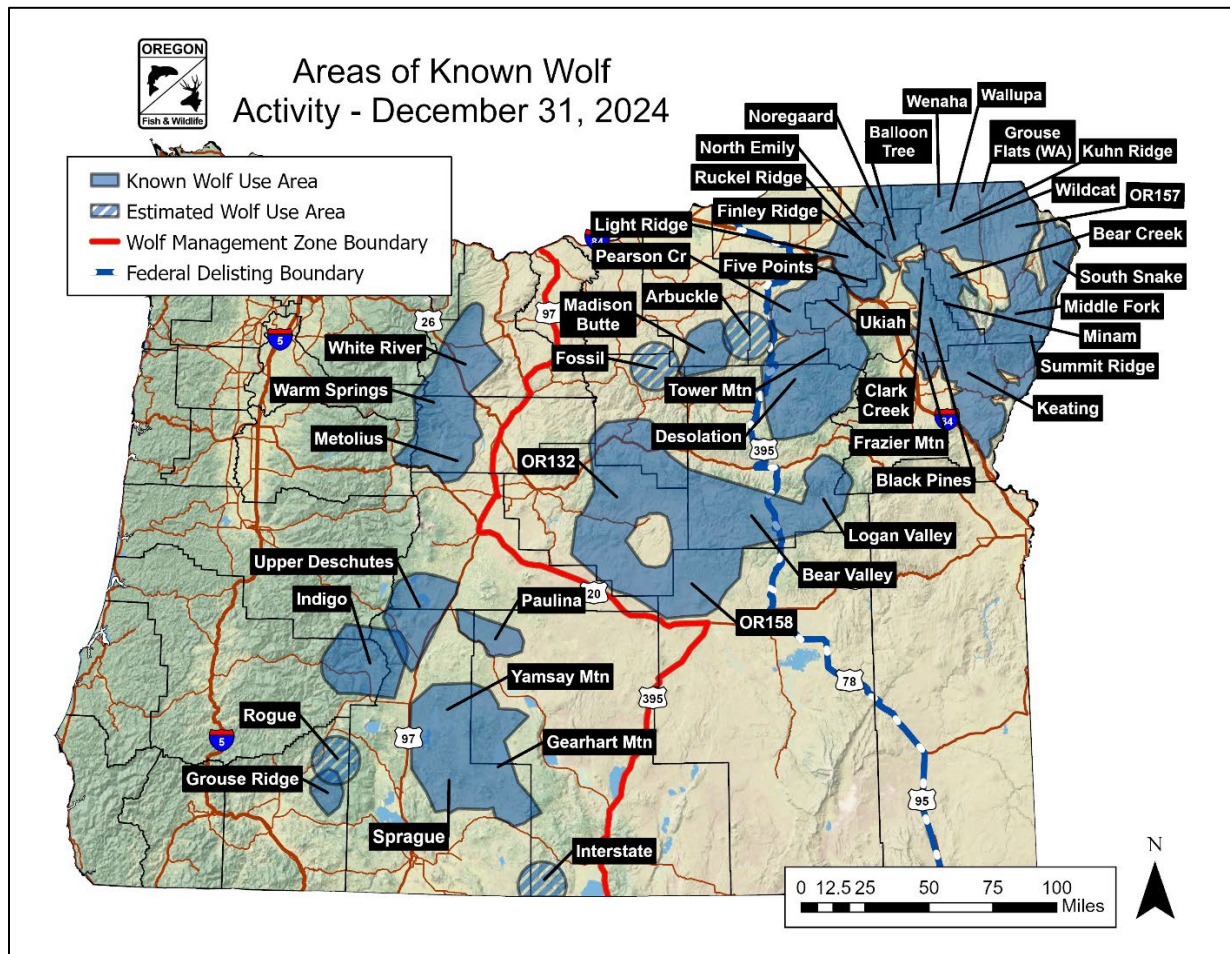


Figure 4. Distribution of known resident wolf activity areas December 31, 2024.

West Wolf Management Zone: Twenty-four percent of known Oregon wolves inhabited the West WMZ at the end of 2024 (n=49, Table 1). The breeding pair count increased from three to seven, with five of those pairs creating new packs. Wolves continued to expand in distribution with 12 AKWAs in the West WMZ, up from 10 in 2023.

Table 1. Minimum wolf count in Oregon on Dec. 31, 2024 in the West Wolf Management Zone. Underlined packs were counted as breeding pairs.

Pack/Group	Total	Pack/Group	Total	Pack/Group	Total
Gearhart Mtn wolves	2	<u>Paulina Pack</u>	6	<u>Warm Springs Pack</u>	7
<u>Grouse Ridge Pack</u>	7	Rogue wolves	2	White River wolves	3
<u>Indigo Pack</u>	6	<u>Sprague Pack</u>	4	<u>Yamsay Mtn Pack</u>	4
<u>Metolius Pack</u>	5	Upper Deschutes wolves	3		

East Wolf Management Zone: Seventy-six percent of known Oregon wolves resided in the East WMZ at the end of 2024 (n=155, Table 2). There were 18 packs in the East WMZ, one more than 2023. Ten packs were documented as successful breeding pairs, down from 12 in 2023. Thirteen wolves were documented alone or in pairs in Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Umatilla, Union and Wheeler counties and may be the start of new packs or dispersers travelling through the area.

Table 2. Minimum wolf count in Oregon on Dec. 31, 2024 in the East Wolf Management Zone. Underlined packs were counted as breeding pairs.

Pack/Group	Total	Pack/Group	Total	Pack/Group	Total
<u>Arbuckle Pack</u>	6	Keating wolves	2	<u>Pearson Creek Pack</u>	6
<u>Balloon Tree Pack</u>	5	<u>Kuhn Ridge Pack</u>	11	<u>Ruckel Ridge Pack</u>	7
<u>Bear Creek Pack</u>	11	Light Ridge wolves	3	South Snake wolves	2
Black Pines wolves	3	<u>Logan Valley Pack</u>	5	<u>Summit Ridge Pack</u>	8
<u>Clark Creek Pack</u>	5	Madison Butte Pack	5	Tower Mtn Pack	5
Desolation wolves	3	Middle Fork Pack	5	Ukiah wolves	3
Finley Ridge Pack	5	Minam Pack	4	Wallupa Pack	5
<u>Five Points Pack</u>	8	Noregaard wolves	3	Wenaha Pack	8
Fossil wolves	2	North Emily wolves	3	Wildcat wolves	3
Frazier Mtn Pack	4	OR157 wolves	2	other wolves	13

Wolves from the Grouse Flats Pack from Washington had radio-collar locations in Oregon during 2024, but denned in Washington and are not included in Oregon’s annual count. Information about Washington packs is available at www.wdfw.wa.gov. At least one member of California’s Whaleback Pack visited Oregon briefly during 2024. Information about California wolves is available at www.wildlife.ca.gov.

Monitoring

The department deployed radio-collars on 23 wolves during 2024. Data were collected from 47 radio-collared wolves in 23 separate areas of wolf activity during 2024. After collar failure, wolf deaths, and dispersal, 28 wolves were still being monitored at year’s end (14% of the minimum wolf count).

The department monitored seven radio-collared wolves dispersing in 2024. Six wolves dispersed within Oregon and one wolf dispersed from Washington into Oregon.

In addition to GPS radio-collar data, department biologists monitored radio-collared and accompanying wolves from the air and ground, implemented track and howling surveys, followed-up on public wolf reports, and conducted remote camera surveillance within areas of known or suspected wolf activity.

Mortalities: Twenty-six wolf mortalities were documented during 2024 (36 in 2023) with all occurring in the East WMZ (Table 3). Four wolf mortalities were categorized as having a natural or unknown cause of death:

- The cause of death is unknown for OR30 in Five Points Pack and the breeding female of Frazier Pack; both were over ten years old.
- The cause of death was undetermined for the breeding female of the Wenaha Pack, and one of her pups was found dead, presumably from starvation/dehydration.

Twenty-two wolf deaths were human-caused (Table 3).

- One dispersing wolf was killed in a motor vehicle collision on Interstate 84 in Union County.
- Eleven wolves were lethally removed for chronic livestock depredation, and three were killed under caught-in-act take. (see Livestock Depredation Management section below).
- The remaining 7 human-caused mortalities are under investigation:
 - Six wolf deaths are under investigation by Oregon State Police (OSP) in the federally delisted portion of Oregon.
 - Two wolves were shot, one from the Logan Valley Pack and one along the Upper Imnaha River in Wallowa County.
 - Four wolves died from poison including three from the South Snake Pack (including both breeders) and the breeding male of the Wenaha Pack. The USFWS is assisting in the South Snake Pack poisoning case as two golden eagles were also killed, in addition to other mammals and birds.
 - The USFWS Office of Law Enforcement, with assistance from OSP, is investigating one illegal wolf death in the federally protected portion of Oregon (Madison Butte Pack).

Table 3. Documented wolf mortalities in 2024 by Wolf Management Zone.

Mortality Source	West WMZ	East WMZ
Natural or Unknown	0	4
Human Caused		
Vehicle Collision	0	1
Caught-In-Act Take	0	3
Chronic Depredation Removal	0	11
Under Investigation by Law Enforcement	0	7

Information and Outreach

Wolves continue to be a subject of high interest in Oregon. Extensive one-on-one communication occurs between staff and a wide range of individuals and audiences, and staff also conduct numerous media interviews and presentations to schools, universities, agencies, agricultural organizations, conservation groups and county compensation committees. The department continues to maintain its wolf website, “Wolves in Oregon” (www.odfw.com/wolves), and in 2024, website content was viewed over 200,000 times, with mobile users accounting for over 60% of site traffic. Email updates regarding statewide wolf information were sent to nearly 14,000 subscribers.

Staffing and Funding

During 2024, two biologists coordinated statewide wolf program activities from the East Region office in La Grande. The federal grant budget allocation for the 2023-2025 biennium is \$968,771. This grant includes 75% federal funds (Pittman-Robertson Grant Program) with 25% state match that comes from a combination of license dollars (8%) and Lottery Funds (17%). Three regional wolf biologists, stationed in Enterprise, Prineville and Central Point field offices, were funded by a permanent allocation of \$992,896 General Fund for the 2023-2025 biennium. In addition, several district wildlife biologists and headquarters staff spend substantial amount of time and resources on wolf program needs and issues.

LIVESTOCK DEPREDATION MANAGEMENT

Department and WS investigators confirmed 69 events of livestock depredation (11 in West WMZ, 58 in East WMZ) and 12 probable depredations in 2024 (Figure 5). Statewide, confirmed depredation events decreased slightly from 2023 to 2024 (73 to 69). Confirmed livestock deaths in 2024 were five cows, 24 calves and 62 sheep (Figure 6). Six cows, 16 calves, two sheep and three livestock working dogs were confirmed as injured by wolves.

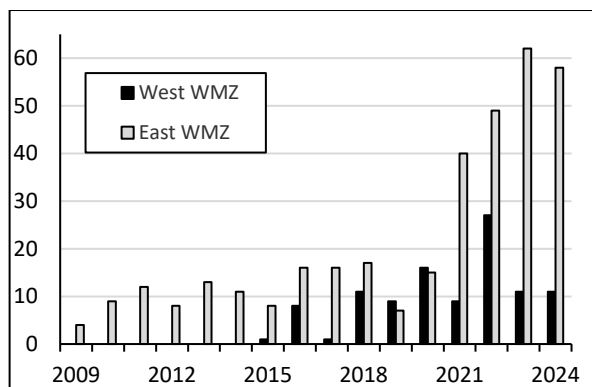


Figure 5. Number of confirmed depredations by Wolf Management Zone by year (2009-2024).

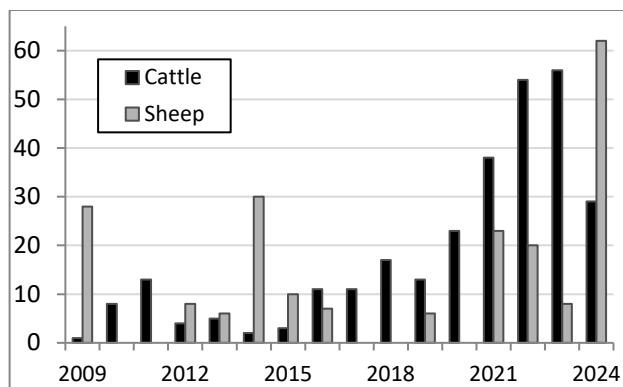


Figure 6. Number of confirmed cattle and sheep deaths from wolves in Oregon by year (2009-2024).

In 2024, 77% of confirmed depredation events occurred on private land and 23% on public land. At least 21 packs/groups and seven lone wolves depredated on livestock during 2024. Fifteen depredated once and five depredated five or more times. Of the packs documented in 2024, 54% had no known depredations. Confirmed depredations over time continue to occur at a lower trajectory than increases in the wolf count (Figure 7).

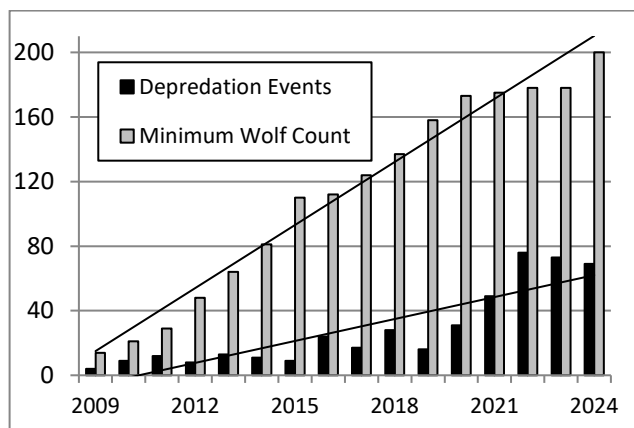


Figure 7. Number and trendline of confirmed depredation events and minimum wolf count in Oregon by year (2009-2024).

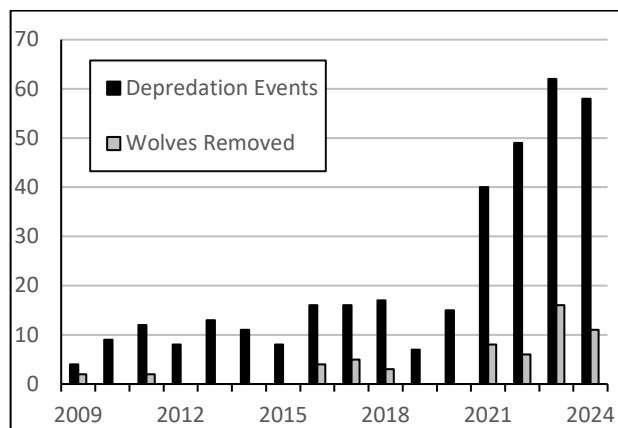


Figure 8. Number of depredation events and wolves removed for chronic depredation in the East WMZ by year (2009-2024).

USDA Wildlife Services (WS), USFWS, county compensation committees and the department worked collaboratively to provide technical advice, funding and field implementation of non-lethal measures to assist livestock producers as they coped with wolf-livestock conflict. Staff focused on reducing

attractants in new areas of wolf activity and protecting livestock in areas with depredating wolves. WS added one full-time position during 2024 to assist landowners in central Oregon.

West Wolf Management Zone

The department confirmed 11 depredations in the West WMZ, the same number as 2023. Five depredations were attributed to the new Grouse Ridge Pack and six other groups depredated once each. All harassment and take were regulated by the USFWS, no lethal removal was authorized in this area.

East Wolf Management Zone

The department confirmed 58 depredations in the East WMZ, which is a small decrease from 2023 (62). Depredation on sheep increased and occurred in eight different pack areas. The number of confirmed cattle deaths due to depredation decreased by 52 percent from 2023.

Under Oregon Administrative Rule 635-110-0030 (Phase III), the department may lethally remove wolves or issue a limited duration permit for a livestock producer to kill wolves to minimize further conflict under a chronic depredation situation if non-lethal measures appropriate for the situation have been employed. Chronic depredation in the East WMZ requires at least two depredations in a nine-month period.

During 2024, eleven individuals or groups reached chronic depredation status in the federally delisted area where the department makes lethal removal decisions. Authorization was given in nine groups for incremental removal, with authorization increasing to include up to all members of the Frazier Mountain Pack after they continued to depredate. Eleven wolves were lethally removed from six groups (Frazier-3, Balloon Tree-2, Wildcat-2, Logan Valley-2, Murderers Creek-1, Tower Mountain - 1) (Figure 8). The breeding females of the Desolation and Tower Mountain Pack were the only breeders removed. Ten wolves were removed through agency action by the department or WS acting on behalf of the department. A livestock producer with a limited-duration permit killed one wolf.

One lethal option available to livestock producers east of Highways 395/78/95 is to lawfully shoot a wolf caught in the act of biting, wounding, killing or chasing livestock or working dogs in certain circumstances without a permit. During 2024, three wolves were killed by livestock producers while caught in the act of attacking their cattle (Grouse Flats-2, Desolation-breeding female).

Compensation for Wolf-Caused Losses

ODA's Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance County Block Grant Program provides four types of financial assistance options. It provides direct compensation for confirmed and probable wolf depredations (deaths and injuries) and payment for livestock reported as missing as a result of wolf depredation. Grant money is also awarded to participating counties to assist with costs to purchase supplies and implement preventative measures. Lastly, the program covers some county program implementation costs.

ODA awarded \$789,565 to 13 counties, an increase from \$477,661 awarded in 2023 (Table 4). ODA fulfilled 100% of county requests for confirmed and probable depredation compensation; missing livestock claims were fulfilled at 50%.

The department’s primary roles in ODA’s compensation program are to delineate areas of known wolf activity and investigate dead or injured livestock to determine if wolf depredation has occurred. Some counties request the department provide input on wolf activity and appropriate preventative non-lethal measures. The USFWS federal prevention grant awarded to ODA to augment the compensation program was competitively awarded by continuing to use the salaries of the three department wolf biologists as part of the requirement for in-kind state matching funds.

Table 4. Funds awarded through the County Block Grant Program in 2024 (source ODA).

County	Confirmed/Probable Death/Injury	Missing Livestock	Prevention	Admin	Total
Baker	\$23,096	\$13,543	\$42,000	\$495	\$79,134
Crook	\$5,222	0	\$9,652	0	\$14,874
Deschutes	\$1,935	\$2,686	\$28,000	0	\$32,621
Grant	\$37,500	\$37,807	\$60,000	\$1,000	\$136,307
Harney	\$3,600	0	\$24,000	\$1,000	\$28,600
Jackson	\$5,100	0	\$60,000	0	\$65,100
Klamath	\$7,500	\$23,075	\$60,000	0	\$90,575
Lake	0	0	\$36,000	0	\$36,000
Morrow	0	0	\$8,000	\$1,000	\$9,000
Umatilla	\$3,200	\$3,530	\$40,000	\$1,000	\$47,730
Union	\$14,850	\$26,982	\$60,000	0	\$101,832
Wallowa	\$29,969	\$60,622	\$54,000	\$1,000	\$145,591
Wheeler	0	0	\$2,202	0	\$2,202
Award Amount	\$131,972 (17%)	\$168,244 (21%)	\$483,854 (61%)	\$5,495 (1%)	\$789,565