

John Williams opening comments
ODFW Commission Meeting, April 24, 2026

I am John Williams, President of the Wallowa County Stockgrowers, Co-chair of the Oregon Cattleman's Association wolf committee and a retired OSU Associate Professor emeritus in the Department of Animal and Range Sciences. Today I am here as the Wallowa County Stockgrowers representative.

In 2011 when the minimum count for wolves in Wallowa County was 17, there were 13 confirmed cattle depredations in the county. Producers have invested extensive time, energy and money into non-lethal activities; however, the depredations have continued to expand to include cattle, sheep, poultry, goats, horses, mules and dogs.

The minimum count of wolves in 2025 was 67 in Wallowa County. Confirmed and probable depredations were 35. The 13 head in 2011 was unacceptably high, and today, even with all the efforts of the ranchers, ODFW and Wildlife Services, the 35 depredations is completely unacceptable.

Additionally, depredations are but a small part of the devastating impact wolves have on ranchers. The normal hunting method of a wolf includes running down their prey. Sometimes a cow will not run, but turn and fight to defend their young or must fight when the herd is cornered. Either way as multiple events occur, most if not all, of the herd becomes traumatized. Couple that with the fact that ranchers, only find 1 in 8 of the carcasses as identified in the Oakleaf study from Idaho, confirmed or probable depredations is a small part of what ranchers are losing to the wolf.

The losses to the producer includes both production loss to the livestock and increased management cost to the operation.

To put some context to these losses for a rancher, taken from a paper written in 2010..... For a rancher with 400 head of cattle, the presence of wolves creates:

- reduced conception rate, \$134.00 per head;
- Reduced weaning weight, \$46.00;
- Depredations \$50.00;
- reduced cow weight, \$57.00 AND
- increased management costs \$93.00,

Totals of \$380.00 per head for each and every cow impacted by the wolves.

That adds up to \$152,000 for a rancher running 400 head.

Those numbers were based on calf prices of \$2.40. Today calf prices are 2 ½ times that, making the cost much higher.

The losses are not just economic; they are also emotional and social. As you can see, wolves costs ranchers both time and money. The time issue becomes critical as ranchers work to protect their herds, losing family time and time away from their normal ranching activities.

I do want to thank the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for the current wolf management approach of emphasizing timely, targeted and humane removal of chronic depredating wolves. The efforts and program direction in Wallowa County is being recognized by the producers as working together to reduce the wolf/livestock conflict that we are all facing. But its not enough.

We need every tool in the tool box.

- We need an increase in the Wildlife Services budget, to keep one of the most effective tools, trained predator control personal, on the ground and available to livestock producers;
- We need help with the non-lethal from as many people, entities and efforts as possible, including the use of targeted, controlled hunting, starting with a pilot project that Jim is going to discuss.
- We need to have aggressive management of wolves to continue to reduce the current level of depredations.

Ranchers cannot and should not be expected to continue to deal with the economic, social and emotional impact the current level of wolves is inflicting on our livestock. Even though we support the current efforts of ODFW in wolf management, we need to prepare for a different paradigm where:

- Wolf populations are at a level in balance with the prey base which protects game populations
- Wolves are at a population where depredations of livestock are minimal and
- Wolf management areas with management objectives have been identified across the state, allowing differing wolf populations be managed with the appropriate emphasis