



LASSEN COUNTY WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN

A strategic guide for the management of the gray wolf for use by
residents and county officials.

County Description:

Lassen County is located in Northeastern California bordered by Modoc County to the north, Plumas and Sierra Counties to the south, Shasta County to the west and Washoe County, Nevada, to the east. It encompasses parts of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada Mountain range. Lassen County contains a large area of publicly administered land by both the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. As of 2024, the approximate population is 28,340 people spread over approximately 4,720 square miles. The county seat is the City of Susanville located near the southern border of the county. Lassen County's economy is characterized by a mix of public and private sectors, with a significant focus on agricultural and livestock production, ranking 36th amongst California Counties.¹ This includes cattle and sheep production.

History of Wolves in Lassen County:

The California Gray Wolf was present in California in the 1800's until the last one was killed in 1924 in Lassen County. This wolf exhibited a threat to the livestock producers of the area and was eradicated to protect the land and livestock. While historical data for the county is uncertain in 1924, the population at the time was far less than the population exists today. The California Gray Wolf is considered to be an extinct species by biologists.²

The Gray Wolf is listed as an endangered species both the Federal Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The introduction of the Canadian Gray Wolf began in Lassen County with the migration of the wolf designated as OR-7 by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2011. The California Fish and Game Commission designated the Gray Wolf as a "non-game" animal at that time. The California Fish and Game Commission added the Gray Wolf to CESA on January 28, 2019. This was upheld through court challenges in California.

Since 2016, discussions have taken place between Lassen County and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). This included public hearings expressing the concerns of residents, especially the agricultural community, about the introduction of an apex predator like the gray wolf in Lassen County. These meetings were used to help generate the *Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves in California (2016)* by CDFW commonly referred to as the Wolf Plan. This plan has been used as the guideline for interactions with the Gray Wolf by all in California.

On October 16, 2018, the Lassen County Board of Supervisors unanimously passed Resolution #18-070 requesting assistance from CDFW to expedite implementation strategies and reduce the adverse effects of the Gray Wolf in California (see Appendix A). The resolution outlined the impacts and concerns about

¹ [Lassen County Demographic and Economic Profile and Long-Run Forecast](#)

² Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves in California, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (December 2016)

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the Wolf Plan and the concerns about the decisions made at that time regarding keeping the Gray Wolf listed on the California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

On April 21, 2020, the Board of Supervisors sent a letter to CDFW and the California Fish and Wildlife Commission stating the concerns about the Gray Wolf and its presence in Lassen County (see Appendix A). The Board of Supervisors expressed its concerns about the Gray Wolf being classified as an endangered species without a scientific basis for its determination.

Concerns continued to escalate amongst the agricultural community in Lassen County as the years passed. The Gray Wolf continued to prey on the producer's livestock. CDFW continued to remain in Phase I of the Wolf Plan until 10 breeding pairs were identified in California. Based on varying counts of the wolf population, CDFW held firm on remaining in Phase I despite evidence of increasing numbers of wolves and more conflicts with the livestock producers. CDFW continued to recommend the use of hazing and deterrence techniques as outlined in the Wolf Plan.

In February 2025, reports were sent to the Lassen County Sheriff's Office regarding the public safety threat by the Gray Wolf to the Dixie Valley Ranch. Wolves were now documented within fifteen yards of a residence, in a child's play area, and near dog kennels. The wolves were attempting to gain access to food containers, and eating trash and human waste from a nearby dumpsite. The residents felt threatened by the presence of the wolves.

In March 2025, a meeting was held with community stakeholders, CDFW, and Lassen County Sheriff John McGarva regarding the public safety threat the wolves have become to livestock producers. The meeting discussed mitigation measures enacted and their perceived effectiveness. Representatives from CDFW toured the property and provided additional mitigation recommendations.

On March 24, 2025, Sheriff McGarva sent a letter to CDFW Director Carleton Bonham regarding the threat the Gray Wolf poses to the residents of Lassen County. This included both livestock and public safety concerns outlined by the meetings held in Lassen County. A meeting was requested to discuss assistance and collaborative effort to address the continuing conflict with the Gray Wolf in Lassen County.

On April 2, 2025, CDFW issued a media release stating that based on the population count concerning the Gray Wolf in Lassen County, they are now moving to Phase II of their Wolf Plan. This was based on the confirmation of two breeding pairs for two consecutive years.

On April 3, 2025, the Lassen County Cattlemen sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors asking for assistance and a local emergency be declared in Lassen County due to the presence and impact of the Gray Wolf.

On May 5, 2025, a letter was sent to the Dixie Valley Ranch stating they had not properly mitigated attractants and gave recommendations for ignoring wolves when seen, installation of fladry and scare boxes, and disposal of human waste and animal carcasses.

The Gray Wolf depredations continued and additional packs have been declared with a direct impact to Lassen County. These packs are the Harvey, Lassen, Ash Pan, Tunnison, Diamond, and Grizzly. Reported depredations in Lassen County were 45 (42 confirmed) for the 2025 year. The beginning of 2026 documented the first horse killed by a wolf in Lassen County. A letter from Sheriff McGarva to Secretary

Crowfoot was sent asking for assistance in the management and constant depredations of the Harvey Pack. The depredations continue to highlight the threat to the public health and safety, as they occur increasingly closer to residential areas. This escalation is causing increased livestock losses and extremely stressful conditions that impact the safety and well-being of residents in Lassen County due to the presence of the Gray Wolf.

The increased vigilance and resulting stress have been a constant for the last few years, with a noted increase in the last twelve months. Those immediately affected had reduced sleep due to sharing range riding responsibilities with neighboring ranchers.

Purpose of the Lassen County Wolf Plan:

The Lassen County Wolf Plan is a collaborative effort to address the growing presence and threat to public safety that has arisen as a growing wolf population is in conflict with the human population already present on the land. Personnel from several county offices assisted in the generation of this plan. As outlined in the Lassen County Hazard Mitigation Plan section 5.4.1.2, wolves and other predators are listed as a serious harm to livestock. This plan was approved by the Lassen County Board of Supervisors for implementation for use by the residents and officials of Lassen County.

Lassen County Officials raised concerns about the presence of apex predators such as the Gray Wolf as well as mountain lions and bears. The population of the Gray Wolf is increasing while prey species are reducing in population. The population of ungulates, such as deer and elk, have reduced annually over the past several years as documented by counts performed by the State of California. The Gray Wolf has become habituated to livestock in Lassen County. 70-90% of wolf scat tested has shown cattle as a primary food source. The habitat of an apex predator such as the Gray Wolf must contain a viable food source other than livestock. California statistics show reduced numbers in ungulates resulting in a food source that cannot sustain the needs of apex predators such as the Gray Wolf.

Communication with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has shown to lack transparency. Information provided is purposefully vague and ambiguous. The data is often old or lacks any current probative value. When asked for current information, Lassen County is stonewalled stating it is "for the protection of an endangered species." Officials stressed to CDFW that the information is not being used to target the Gray Wolf, but rather provide affected producers guidance regarding concentration of prevention and mitigation efforts. Sheriffs from around the North State have requested the information but are met with similarly ambiguous responses. Direct communication has only improved after increased pressure from the media and legislators requesting transparency and information to address wolf conflicts. However, responses have still been vague and ambiguous providing little useful information to assist in the mitigation of depredations by the Gray Wolf.

Public safety has become the driving force behind the wolf plan in Lassen County. The wolf packs are directly impacting our homes and citizens with increased presence near residential areas. The wolves have attacked animals within yards of occupied residences. Their presence has increased concerns and effects on those who live near the established packs and has placed residents in a constant state of heightened awareness, proven to affect their mental and physical well-being. The increased population

of the county and increasing population of wolves has resulted in more human-wildlife conflicts which will inevitably result in a violent interaction between people and wolves.

Lassen County Wolf Plan Goals:

The introduction of the Canadian Gray Wolf into Lassen County is not classified as a resurgence of an extinct species, but the introduction of an invasive species into the current environment. The presence of the wolf has become a significant disruption to the public health and safety for the citizens of Lassen County and this Wolf Plan will be implemented in three phases starting with Phase I. The goals of the Wolf Plan are the following:

- Minimize the conflict between the citizens of Lassen County and the Canadian Gray Wolf
- Preserve public safety and mitigate the loss of property
- Establish guidelines for the citizens of Lassen County for the management of Gray Wolves in Lassen County
- Minimize wolf-livestock depredation
- Communicate with the public regarding presence of Gray Wolf and its possible effects on the residents of Lassen County
- Establish mitigation strategies and provisions for public safety and protection of property affected by the Gray Wolf.
- Effectively reduce wolf conflicts with balanced and complimentary lethal and non-lethal tools. Management tools must be adaptable to fit specific situations and needs.

Wolves in Lassen County exist in very diverse geographic locations. It is critically important that Lassen County's diverse topography and observed wolf behavior is considered when making management decisions and policies.

The plan is meant to be used as a guideline and not to be used as a one-size--fits-all approach to the County. Each individual producer, citizen, or resident may fit into a different area of the plan as it pertains to their individual situation and needs.

Nothing in this plan is intended to eliminate the right for anyone to protect themselves or their property from the imminent and/or active attack by a Gray Wolf. The law allows for the protection of yourself or others from the imminent threat of attack, even from endangered species.

Mitigation and Prevention Techniques Defined:

Depredation: Killing of livestock, poultry or pets by a problem predator or causing of property damage by the predator.

Fladry: A method of nonlethal deterrent that entails hanging numerous strips of flagging along a fence or other device, and is intended to keep wolves out of an area.

Guardian Animal: An animal (usually a dog) used for providing protection for livestock and ranches.

Incidental Take Permit: This permit allows a permittee to take a CESA-listed species if such taking is incidental to, and not the purpose of, carrying out an otherwise lawful activity.³

Injurious Harassment: Aversive conditioning that causes any object to physically contact a wolf, including firearms discharging nonlethal ammunition (e.g., rubber bullets or bean bags) or using motorized equipment (e.g., all-terrain vehicle, drone, motorcycle or four-wheel drive vehicle) to follow or pursue a wolf.

Lethal Control: Will be implemented when a wolf demonstrates aggressive action that has resulted in physical contact with a human; or a wolf exhibits an immediate threat to public health and safety based on the totality of the circumstances

Radio Activated Guard or Scare Box: A device designed to frighten wolves usually placed near livestock pastures and are activated either by presence detected by a collared wolf or in timed intervals to deter wolves from approaching.

Ranch Management Plan: Plan implemented by producers to reduce the attractants and deter a predator from approaching their property and continue the depredation of livestock.

Range Riding: The practice of monitoring livestock including activities such as monitoring carnivore activity and deploying measures to reduce conflicts with wolves and other carnivores. Often done with the use of non-lethal methods such as noise-making and human presence.

Take: As defined by CDFW regulations includes hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, capture, or kill.⁴

Ranch Management Plans:

Ranch Management Plans are essential to effective implementation of the Lassen County Wolf Plan. These plans are made by individual producers to help mitigate and prevent wolf depredations on their livestock. Each plan is tailored to the individual producer for effective management of their lands. This could include easements or permits they hold on public lands for livestock use. Resources are available through the California Cattlemen's Association to assist with the development of Ranch Management Plans.

The plans describe all mitigation techniques used to assist in predator deterrence. These techniques need to be consistent with all relevant laws and regulations regarding the management of an endangered species. Ranchers are encouraged to document and address notable issues that prevent

³ California Code of Regulations Title 14, Sections 783.2-783.8

⁴ California Fish and Game Code Section 86

the implementation of depredations procedures based on conditions or circumstances. These could include carcass removal, use of guard animals, electric fencing, etc. Based on the information provided, Lassen County Officials can work with ranchers to address outstanding mitigation concerns and provide resources to assist when necessary. This plan can be used as a reference point to authorize the actions to be taken if (or when) a depredation occurs.

CDFW's Wolf Tracker website can assist with planning and deterrence of wolves in the area of ranches. The polygon on the map shows recent date where a collared wolf is ranging so they can place appropriate deterrents making their area less attractive to apex predators like the Gray Wolf.

A template for the Ranch Management Plan is provided in Appendix A.

Investigation Procedures:

The introduction of the Canadian Gray Wolf into Lassen County is not classified as a resurgence of an extinct species, but the introduction of an invasive species into the current environment. The presence of the wolf has become a significant disruption to the public health and safety for the citizens of Lassen County and this Wolf Plan will be implemented.

The incident will be investigated and make the following determination:

- *Confirmed:* Confirmed depredation by a Gray Wolf
- *Undetermined:* Evidence is inconclusive to confirm or deny the Gray Wolf was responsible for the depredation
- *Negative:* Gray Wolf was not responsible for the depredation

Once the outcome of the investigation is determined, officials will complete an incident report containing the following information:

- Date, time, and location of the incident
- Photographs of the scene will be taken to document the depredation scene and public safety concerns that are present.
- Estimated distance and direction from main residence to the scene of the depredation
- DNA samples taken of the wounds caused during the depredation and submitted to the Lassen County Sheriff's Office for storage until testing can be completed.
 - While working with CDFW is ongoing, the samples may be submitted at the discretion of the Sheriff to a suitable lab for testing as necessary. The sample can be used to confirm or deny the depredation was caused by a Gray Wolf.
 - Samples are typically obtained by the Federal Trapper, but can be taken by trained personnel
- Depredation reports by the trapper are requested by the Lassen County Sheriff's Office regarding circumstances and outcome of the depredation to assist in determination of the incident and disposition.
- Notation of all mitigation methods taken by the owner of the property and noted effectiveness

- Locations of collared wolves in the area (if known)
- Number of total confirmed depredations for the landowner as of the date of the report

Authorized actions to be taken based on number of depredations in a calendar year:

The listed actions are recommendations based on information provided by the noted resources. Nothing in this document is intended to prevent someone from the immediate defense of life. Unlike the provision for the public safety take of the mountain lion⁵, no provision exists in the California Fish and Game Code for the public safety take of a Gray Wolf. It should be noted that current case law does not support the taking of an endangered species for the protection of livestock only.⁶

Zero to Five Depredations:

All non-lethal provisions to deter the Gray Wolf are authorized under the permit. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Off-highway vehicles to deter approaching animals
- Drones
- Less than Lethal weapons
- Other methods of deterrents and mitigation (ex. Fladry, scare boxes)

More than Five Depredations:

If provisions are met including training, mitigations strategies and deterrents, then the use of lethal take can be authorized. This would include the use of a depredation permit issued by either CDFW or USFWS. Coordination with USFWS will be done through either the Agricultural Commissioner or the County Sheriff. Under the Federal Endangered Species Act removal is allowed where an animal has shown to be a demonstrable, but nonimmediate, threat to human safety providing the removal is done in a humane manner.⁷ Any and all taking of wolves will be coordinated with the USFWS and CDFW based on established practices for removal.

⁵ California Fish and Game Code Section 4801

⁶ United States v. Wallen (2019)

⁷ Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations Section 17.21(c)(3)(iv)