

Wood River Wolf Project

Volunteer Information

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the Wood River Wolf Project (WRWP or the “Project”)! This document will provide you information on the history and goals of the Project and our expectations and requirements for field volunteers.

At the bottom of the document you can find out how to sign up to be a volunteer. We have included our liability waiver; please read it carefully. If you have any questions, please contact Avery Shawler at avery.wrwp@gmail.com or 802.377.5066 (mobile).

Overview of the Wood River Wolf Project

Mission

The Wood River Wolf Project is a partnership of local conservation organizations, ranching operations, and county, state, and federal agencies working together to use proactive, nonlethal deterrents to minimize livestock and wolf conflicts.

Background

The Wood River Wolf Project was initiated in 2008 to demonstrate the efficacy of nonlethal deterrents to prevent livestock and predator losses in the Project’s Protected Area.

The Protected Area grew over time and now includes all of the Big Wood River watershed to a southern boundary defined by an east-west line that crosses the Wood River Valley in the vicinity of Bellevue. The Little Wood River drainage, although that stream and the Big Wood are confluent in the vicinity of Gooding, is not included, nor are the Bellevue triangle and Silver Creek.

Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) were once one of the most widespread mammals on earth. In North America, wolves once ranged across most of the continent from the frozen arctic to the Mexican deserts, but persecution driven by concerns about predation on livestock led to the near eradication of the species from the conterminous 48 United States by the early 20th century. Idaho’s Blaine County is one of the first areas in Idaho to adopt policy supporting the use of nonlethal tools and techniques to reduce wolf-livestock conflicts across a wide area.

In 2007, a newly-formed wolf pack began killing sheep along central Idaho's "sheep superhighway" in the Sawtooth National Forest during the summer grazing season. Wolf advocates, ranchers, scientists and county officials collaborated to implement nonlethal deterrent strategies to prevent further losses. Because of this new partnership, which became the Wood River Wolf Project, state and federal wolf managers refrained from lethally controlling the pack while these methods were tested. Seven years later, documented sheep losses to wolves in the protected area were 90% lower than the Idaho loss rate reported by USDA's National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS). Specifically, the loss rate in the protected area averaged 0.05% compared to NASS's 0.54% state-wide estimates over the same period. In addition, the wolf depredation loss rate in the adjacent unprotected area was 3.5 times greater than in the area protected by the Project. Out of the 11 total incidents of sheep lost to wolves confirmed in the Protected Area during the 7 year history of the Project, 8 of the incidents involved only one or two sheep and no single confirmed incident exceeded 12 sheep. Outside of the Protected Area, some lethal control occurred in 2014 when two packs were lethally removed by government wildlife managers. However in the Protected Area no wolves were killed by wildlife managers or livestock operators.

The Project has demonstrated that it is possible to reduce not only sheep losses due to depredation by wolves but also the lethal control of wolves. As a consequence, social conflict is reduced while simultaneously maintaining the wolf's important ecological contributions.

The Project uses a wide range of non-lethal deterrents and stakeholder empowerment and trust-building methods, and employs strategies to address chronic conflict areas using a community-based conflict transformation model.

Although the Project was a collaborative since inception, it was led until recently by Defenders of Wildlife. The Lava Lake Institute for Science & Conservation (the "Lava Lake Institute") assumed the role of fiscal agency for the Project during the summer of 2015. The Project is managed by a Steering Committee consisting of federal and county officials, sheep ranchers, and conservation organizations.

Non-lethal deterrent techniques and tools

- 1. Human presence** - Increasing human presence at sheep bands is the most effective way to keep wolves away. This is why the WRWP is coordinating to have groups of volunteers to be on-call to go and camp with the sheep when wolves are nearby. The scent and sounds of humans make wolves wary.
- 2. Guard dogs** - Guard dogs such as Great Pyrenees, Akbash, or Pyrenees-Akbash mixes, are known to be effective in protecting sheep herds, especially when there are two or more. The dogs will bark alarms, warning the herd and spooking predators. They will also chase predators and stand between them and livestock.

3. **Fladry/Turbo-fladry** - Standard fladry consists of polypropylene cording or similar material on which red or orange cloth, flagging, or taping is hung at 18" intervals and strung on temporary or permanent fence posts. First used in Europe to surround wolves in order to hunt them, fladry has now been adapted for use as a wolf deterrent. Something about the flags and their movement causes the wary wolf to stay outside the line of fladry. Like standard fladry, turbo-fladry consists of cording with colored flagging spaced evenly along its length. But turbo-fladry is strung on electric fencing material. It combines the effectiveness of non-electric fladry with the shock delivering power of an electric fence, so that if a wolf does overcome its initial fear of normal fladry and attempts to pass, a shock is delivered and reinforces the avoidance instinct.
4. **Foxlights** - Foxlights keep predators away by using a computerized varying flash that projects 360 degrees and can be seen from 1 kilometer away. These lights make it appear that someone is patrolling with a flashlight, which keeps predators away.
5. **Airhorns, starter pistols, boomboxes and other noisemakers** - Having various noisemakers to employ when wolves are nearby will scare them from the herd.
6. **High-intensity Spotlights** - These spotlights can be seen from a very long way away and will scare wolves because of their brightness. They are for the herders and volunteers to wield.

Volunteer Information

The Wood River Wolf Project relies heavily on the participation of volunteers. The range of Volunteer activities covers a wide variety of tasks, including, among many others, increasing human presence near sheep bands, ferrying supplies to herders, assisting with injured animals (sheep, guard dogs, herding dogs or horses), placing/picking up motion sensing cameras in the field and changing batteries and SD cards, data and photo entry, driving personnel, translating for the benefit of herders and field staff, and implementing many other non-lethal deterrents.

While some of these activities obviously incur more risk than others, it is important for all volunteers to know what to expect when volunteering for the WRWP. Some of these activities might not be suitable for all those interested in volunteering and it is important that all parties are aware of the capabilities of each volunteer. We do not want inexperienced volunteers to bring unnecessary risk to the field by endangering themselves and others.

Volunteer Requirements

- Must be able to hike while carrying 30 lbs of equipment
- Must have experience backpacking in the backcountry

- Must have proper clothing and personal equipment (see recommended gear list, below)
- Must have a positive attitude in difficult conditions
- Must read (in full) and sign Volunteer Liability Waiver (see last page of this document) before going into the field
- Knowledge of Basic First Aid

Additional Useful Qualifications

- Wilderness First Aid or Wilderness First Responder skills
- Spanish speaking skills

Recommended Gear List

- First Aid Kit
- Sturdy hiking boots
- A backpacking pack that fits
- Sleeping bag (make sure it is warm enough for fall conditions at high elevation)
- Sleeping pad
- Backpacking tent
- Lots of warm layers (non-cotton base layers/long underwear, fleece, puffy jacket)
- Pants (might require off-trail hiking and sagebrush scratches!)
- Gloves, hat/beanie, extra wool socks
- Headlamp with extra batteries, and/or bring an additional light source
- 3 liters of water
- Stove, fuel, and lighter
- Mess kit
- Food and snacks

- Knife and/or multi-tool

Volunteers going into the backcountry must be comfortable with the following activities:

- Navigating in the backcountry without cell service
- Hiking in the dark and possibly late at night
- Hiking and navigating in trail-less areas
- Backpacking up to 8 miles (likely at considerable altitude and over rough terrain)
- Hiking and camping under adverse conditions (cold, wind, snow, sleet, electrical storms, etc.)
- Exposure to dangerous wildlife such as bears, mountain lions and other predators, occasionally at close quarters
- Being surrounded by livestock (more than 2,000 ewes and lambs), guard dogs, sheep dogs and horses (See guidelines for interacting with sheep bands)

Interacting with Sheep Bands Protocol [Kurt Holtzen]

Wildlife Safety Protocol [Kurt Holtzen]

Wildfire Safety Protocol [Robert Garcia]

Fire Discipline [Robert Garcia]

Emergency Protocol [Kurt Holtzen]

Rules for Volunteers

- Never go alone
- Do not disclose sensitive information such as wolf locations to the public; communicate sensitive information to WRWP staff
- If contacted by the media, refer them to Brian Bean or to another member of the WRWP Steering Committee (see Steering Committee, below)

Once you understand the conditions and risks involved with volunteer service to the WRWP, please fill out the form on the Volunteer page of the Wood River Wolf Project website. We will get back to you soon.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RISK AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY

Wood River Wolf Project

As a Wood River Wolf Project (WRWP) Volunteer ("Volunteer"), I, the undersigned, understand that the areas I will be working in are in the backcountry, and that medical treatment beyond basic first aid may not be available in a timely manner, that communication by satellite phone is subject to technological and climactic vagaries and that emergency transportation to a medical facility, if I am injured, may be delayed based on my location, weather and/or road conditions, and other factors.

I, the undersigned Volunteer, understand that some of the volunteer activities have inherent risks, which are beyond the control of the Lava Lake Institute for Science & Conservation (the "Institute"), producers, government agencies, and any other organization or person affiliated with the WRWP and their respective employees and assigns.

I, the undersigned Volunteer, understand that the risks while volunteering for the WRWP include, **but are not limited to**, severe weather, including micro-bursts, unseasonably cold weather, precipitation in the form of rain, sleet and snow, and very strong winds, resulting in hypothermia or death; envenomation by rattlesnake and poisonous insect; death or serious injury resulting from hiking on rough and uneven terrain; death or serious injury from encounters with mountain lions, black bears and other predatory and non-predatory animals; and death or serious injury from wildfire or other natural event that may be encountered in a backcountry or wilderness setting.

I, the undersigned Volunteer, understand that these risks also include the risk of injury or death during transportation to, from the areas where volunteers are needed.

I, the undersigned Volunteer, understand that *I assume all risks associated with the volunteering for the WRWP.*

I, the undersigned Volunteer, acknowledge that *I am responsible for my own safety.*

I, the undersigned Volunteer, *assume full responsibility for personal injury to myself* resulting from my behavior and actions while I am volunteering for the WRWP.

I, the undersigned Volunteer, *assume full responsibility for loss or damage to my personal property* while volunteering for the WRWP and for any expenses associated with such loss as a result of my negligence.

I agree to hold any and all entities and persons involved with the WRWP, including...

...the Institute and its officers, directors and employees (including WRWP field staff, other volunteers and any other persons engaged in a paid or non-paid capacity by the Institute on behalf of the WRWP), WRWP-participating sheep operators and their employees, and the individual members of the WRWP Steering Committee and the organizations such members represent...

...harmless in case of injury to myself and/or the loss of my personal property.

I have carefully read and understand this Acknowledgement of Risk and Release of Liability,
and have voluntarily signed my name below:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____