

Blackfeet Tribe

Wolf  
Management  
Plan

Adopted By Blackfeet Tribal Business Council June, 2008

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## **I. Introduction and Definition of Need**

Wolves are native to the Blackfeet Reservation and historic traditional territory of Blackfeet. Wolves co-existed with the Blackfeet people throughout history and are, like many wildlife species, entwined in Blackfeet culture, tradition, and religion.

The wolf population on the Blackfeet Reservation, like in the rest of the U.S., was nearly killed off early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wolf recovery began in the western U.S. in the 1980s. Wolves naturally migrated into northern Montana from Canada and a federal program reintroduced wolves into Yellowstone and Idaho. Conservation efforts and protection under the Endangered Species Act have allowed populations to increase and spread throughout much of Montana, including the Blackfeet Reservation. The cultural value in addition to the more contemporary aesthetic, scientific, and economic values of wolves make their conservation desirable to the Blackfeet Tribe. The potential for conflict between wolves and people is high, however. Active management and public education is necessary to balance the presence of wolves with the interests and well-being of people including issues of livestock depredation and harassment, pet predation and personal safety.

## **II. Goal**

The goal of this wolf management plan is to provide for the long term presence of wolves on the Blackfeet Reservation by implementing best management practices to minimize human and wolf conflict while incorporating Blackfeet cultural values and beliefs.

## **III. Objectives**

1. Provide to Tribal game wardens and Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department (BFWD) personnel specific training on wolf behavior and management, wolf depredation investigation techniques, and capture and handling techniques.
2. Incorporate Blackfeet culture and traditions into the management of wolves on the reservation.
3. Provide information on wolf biology, ecology, and management to residents on the Blackfeet Reservation.
4. Provide direction to investigate and take appropriate action to resolve conflicts between wolves and people.
5. Provide direction and training to report and record all conflicts between wolves and people.
6. Mitigate losses that people incur due to the presence or actions of wolves.

7. Provide for monitoring efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of this plan and to revise the plan when necessary.
8. Provide direction to collect information on the status of the wolf population and on the general health of wolves.

#### **IV. Wolf Management Policy**

Wolf management policy on the Blackfeet Reservation conformed to federal regulation while wolves remain listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Now that wolves are delisted they will be classified as big game animals and the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Dept. will manage wolves as they do other species of wildlife on the reservation.

Wolf hunting may be considered a management option the same as with other big game on the reservation. Wolf hunting will be regulated with quotas through the Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Code.

Blackfeet wolf management policy will be to manage neither toward a maximum nor a minimum number of wolves on the reservation. Management direction will be to assure the long term presence of a wolf population and minimize the potential of conflict with people and resolve that conflict when it occurs. Wolf population management strategies will depend more on wolf behavior and amount of conflict with livestock and people. If there are few or no conflicts with a high known population of wolves on the reservation there will be no excessive effort to reduce the wolf population or retard population growth. Conversely, if there are only a few wolves on the reservation and they repeatedly kill livestock and management guidelines dictate lethal control they may all be removed.

Another possible consideration in wolf population management is the effect wolves have on wild ungulate populations. The Blackfeet Tribe manages elk, moose, and deer on the reservation to provide important hunting opportunities to tribal members and as a source of revenue for the tribe by selling limited trophy hunting opportunities to the public. If evidence shows wolves are having a severe impact on ungulate herds and reducing them to unacceptable levels the wolf harvest quota may be adjusted within reason to reduce the number of wolves accordingly.

Wolf behavior resulting in livestock depredation or harassment, killing of pets, or aggression toward people will be considered undesirable nuisance behavior and management response will be directed toward behavior modification or wolf removal. Nonnuisance behavior that will probably evolve to nuisance behavior or human habituation, such as eating garbage or pet food will be discouraged through aversive conditioning or other management options.

Varying levels of management response to conflicts will be considered depending on the type of conflict, the number of times conflicts have occurred, and the status of the wolf population on the reservation and in northwest Montana. For example, if an investigation determines a pack of wolves is killing livestock, nonlethal management actions may be tried first. Different livestock management practices may be recommended or scare devices used if practical. If lethal control is used one or two wolves may be removed rather than the entire pack. Management actions may be halted then to see if the removals had the desired effect and stopped depredations.

## **V. Plan Implementation**

### A. Department Responsibilities

The Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Department (BFWD) will implement the wolf management plan. The director of the BFWD is responsible for the department's actions. The Tribal Wildlife Biologist will assume responsibilities for training personnel and acquisition and maintenance of permits, drugs, and other immobilizing equipment, traps, and telemetry equipment. Trained BFWD personnel will assume the lead role in management actions that involve wolves.

### B. Regulations

Tribal regulations regarding hunting, illegal killing, and harassing wolves are included in the Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Code. Regulations in the code can be added, deleted, or changed as necessary by the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council through procedures listed in the code. Blackfeet Tribal game wardens enforce regulations in the Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Code. Tribal game wardens will coordinate with federal, state, or local county authorities as necessary in enforcement of laws.

### C. Public Education

BFWD staff will notify area public, private, and post-secondary schools of their availability to present educational programs about wolf biology and management to classes. Educational films and material will also be collected and kept for loan to schools and other interested groups.

Opportunities will be provided for school classes or individuals interested in research or monitoring activities for educational purposes.

### D. Investigation of Conflicts

All calls, complaints, and reports of conflicts with wolves will be investigated to determine the nature of the problem and if wolves were involved. Investigations of dead or injured livestock will include examinations sufficient to determine the cause of death whenever possible. All losses attributed to wolves will be documented. Photographs will

be taken to record all evidence that is used to assess the incident and make a decision on management action. Assistance in investigations may be requested from USDA Wildlife Services (WS) agents. If the WS agent is not immediately available the investigation will be initiated by authorized tribal personnel. Investigators will use caution to not destroy evidence before it is appropriately documented. If a WS agent is not available for the initial investigation one may be requested by the landowner for a second opinion.

#### E. Records of Investigations

Incident investigations will be recorded on standard livestock depredation or nuisance wolf report forms (Appendix A). They will be categorized according to incident type and kept on file in the BFWD office. Copies of the reports will be made available for individuals involved and cooperating agencies that are assisting with investigations or reimbursement claims.

#### F. Reimbursement for Losses caused by Wolves

The Blackfeet Tribe or BFWD does not assume responsibility for livestock depredations, livestock harassment, killing of pets, or other damages caused by wolves. The BFWD will make efforts to acquire reimbursement for people with confirmed wolf losses through agreements with private organizations and/or other agencies. Copies of investigation reports and other evidence will be made available to organizations or agencies funding reimbursement programs. The BFWD will coordinate with funding agencies or organizations to ensure their information requirements are included in investigation report forms.

Any compensation program must be equally available to all livestock producers anywhere within the exterior boundaries of the Blackfeet Reservation.

#### G. Guidelines for Wolf Conflict Management

Management response to wolf conflicts will depend on the severity of the conflict and the number of individuals involved. Initial attempts to resolve many conflicts may use nonlethal methods to prevent the conflict from recurring. Conflict prevention methods may include the use of fladry if the areas needing protection are small, recommendations on ranching practices, special fencing, scare devices, or guard dogs. Nonlethal actions taken on wolves may include trapping and radio collaring with subsequent monitoring, harassment, relocation, or aversive conditioning.

Subsequent conflicts or behavior that may threaten people may be dealt with by lethal control on all or some of the wolves involved.

#### Table 1 Management Responses to Wolf/Human Conflicts

Conflict Type	Responses
Mild habituation to humans or first incidence of food conditioning	<u>1 wolf or multiple wolves:</u> Nonlethal-harassment, trapping, collaring, and monitoring. Examine reason for conflict and apply preventative measures.
Major habituation or subsequent evidence of food conditioning	<u>1 wolf:</u> Lethal control <u>Multiple wolves:</u> Trapping, collaring, and monitoring combined with harassment and lethal control of 1 or more of the wolves. Examine reason for conflict and apply preventative measures.
Livestock depredation-first incident.	<u>1 wolf:</u> Lethal control or trapping, collaring, & monitoring <u>Multiple wolves:</u> Trapping, collaring, monitoring. Examine livestock practices and recommend changes or preventative measures if needed.
Livestock depredation-subsequent incidents.	<u>1 wolf:</u> Lethal control <u>Multiple wolves:</u> Trapping, collaring, monitoring combined with lethal control of 2-3 wolves. Examine livestock practices and recommend changes or preventative measures if needed. Evaluate effectiveness of actions. More wolves killed after each subsequent depredation until depredations are alleviated.

#### H. Wolf Relocation

As a general rule wolves will not be relocated within the boundaries of the Blackfeet Reservation. The Blackfeet Tribe may enter into an agreement with another agency or a zoo facility that is willing to accept live nuisance wolves if they will be treated in a humane and respectful way.

#### I. Wolf Trapping and Handling

Leg-hold wolf traps set for management or research purposes will have offset jaws and teeth or other modifications commonly used by WS agents to prevent serious injuries to captured wolves. All traps set for wolves must be checked at least once every day. Wolves will be handled in a respectful way and as humanely as possible.

#### J. Legal Killing of Wolves

Ranchers or their agents may kill a wolf that is seen actively killing or threatening to kill livestock or herding or guarding animals. The public may kill a wolf that is seen in the act of actively attacking or killing their pet or if the wolf threatens people. If a wolf is killed under any of these provisions the person responsible must report the incident to BFWD within 24 hours and surrender the wolf carcass to the BFWD. Failure to do so will be a violation of the law.

People with a valid wolf permit or tag may kill a wolf during hunting if one is established by the BFWD. Hunters or trappers must also report their wolf kills within 24 hours.

Any person killing a wolf wearing a radio collar must return the collar to BFWD.

#### K. Accidental Capture of Wolves

Trappers who accidentally capture a wolf must release it unharmed immediately. If the wolf is already injured or they cannot release it they must contact BFWD personnel as soon as possible to handle the wolf.

#### L. Harassment of Wolves

Anyone may harass or chase a wolf without injuring it if it is near livestock, pets, residences, or people.

#### M. Illegal Killing of Wolves

It will be illegal for anyone to kill a wolf other than under the provisions listed in section J. Suspected illegal mortalities will be investigated by the Blackfeet Tribal Game Wardens the same as other wildlife on the reservation.

#### N. Disposition of Dead Wolves

Wolves killed for management reasons or carcasses surrendered to the BFWD are the property of the Blackfeet Tribe. Samples will be collected to study wolf health and genetics. Hides and skulls may be saved for educational purposes. Members of the Blackfeet Tribe who desire a wolf hide or other parts for cultural or religious purposes may submit a letter of request to the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council or their designated authority. Once the proper authority signs the letter of request it may be presented to the BFWD who will fill the request if the parts are available or file the letter until the parts become available.

### O. Research and Monitoring

The BFWD will use a variety of monitoring methods to ascertain the status of the wolf population on the reservation. Methods may include maintaining a record of sightings and reports of wolves or tracks, winter track surveys, trail cameras set at baits, and trapping, radio collaring, and monitoring members of a pack.

### **VI. Plan Review and Revision**

This wolf management plan may be revised at any time by consensus of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. Any cooperating parties or agencies that have agreements with the Blackfeet Tribe that may be affected by a revision in the plan will be notified of changes. The wolf management plan will be reviewed annually for the first 3 years it is in effect then every 5 years by the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Dept. to evaluate its effectiveness and to revise shortcomings.

# Appendix A

## Blackfeet Reservation Livestock Depredation Investigation

Date Investigated \_\_\_\_\_ Date Complaint Received \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Livestock Owner \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ UTM x \_\_\_\_\_ y \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ NAD \_\_\_\_\_ UTM Zone \_\_\_\_\_

Sec. \_\_\_\_\_ T \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ Descriptive Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Land Ownership: (Tribe, Private fee, Allotted) \_\_\_\_\_

Depredation Site Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Livestock losses/injuries claimed: \_\_\_\_\_

Verified: \_\_\_\_\_

Condition of livestock prior to death: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Value: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated time since death: \_\_\_\_\_ Kill Covered? \_\_\_\_\_

Signs of struggle or drag marks? \_\_\_\_\_ Blood on ground? \_\_\_\_\_

Location of tooth marks: \_\_\_\_\_ Diastema: \_\_\_\_\_

Clawmarks: \_\_\_\_\_

Hemorrhage: \_\_\_\_\_

Probable reason for death: \_\_\_\_\_

Tracks present: (species) \_\_\_\_\_

	Front foot	Rear foot	Other sign: (scats, hair, etc.)
Pad width	_____	_____	_____
Pad length	_____	_____	_____
Claw length	_____	_____	_____

Description of carcass: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeding pattern: \_\_\_\_\_ % consumed: \_\_\_\_\_

Photos taken: \_\_\_\_\_ Samples collected: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigation Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

Management Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Management Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative/Sketches: (may continue on back of this paper)