

From Northeastern Oregon:

How Do Wolves Affect You?



PHOTO COURTESY OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH & WILDLIFE

Ranch women strive to shed light on the realities of living and working with wolf presence in Northeast Oregon's picturesque Wallowa County.

by **KIM HOLT,**
field editor

Sept. 13, 2012:

"This is Ramona Phillips of Oregon Wolf Education with the Canadian Gray Wolf Report. How do wolves affect you? That is what our billboard in Island City (Ore.) has been asking for over a year now.

"Private property rights done away with, hunters finding wolf tracks instead of game, outfitters being trailed by wolves, walking your dogs in certain areas no longer safe, and then there is the loss of livestock and wildlife.

"A few days ago another calf was killed. This 400-pound (lb.) heifer calf was named 'Emily.' Emily had been ear-tagged by students from Portland as part of the 4-H Urban-Rural Exchange program (see "Bridging the urban-rural divide" on page 28). My husband and I have hosted five girls from Portland as part of this wonderful educational exchange. Our girls were enthusiastic and embraced every chore.

"They helped tag calves, feed cows and were able to watch calves being born. ... They were more than willing to embrace our rural lifestyle. They were open-minded and eager. They brought a calf in that had been born in a mud puddle at midnight and were happy to see it alive and healthy in the hotbox at the 4 o'clock check.

"Wildlife Services (WS) declared Emily to be yet another victim of the wolves. Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW)

reported Emily to be a victim of the now infamous possible-unknown. Emily was found on private property in known wolf territory. Emily belonged to Todd Nash, who has lost numerous animals to the wolves. He and his wife, Angie, have hosted kids from Portland for many years. These kids will now have to experience what ranchers do — the loss of an animal, nurtured under our care and killed by circumstances beyond our control.

"And though this is our life, it is also our livelihood. To add salt to the wound, there will be no financial compensation, either. I am not going into the gory details of Emily's demise, but I will share with you what I know it does to my brother, Todd, and to all of the ranchers who have found themselves in this position. It goes against all of our instincts as good herdsman. It is heart-wrenching and stomach-sickening. ..."

Relocated Canadian gray wolves released into Yellowstone and the central Idaho wilderness in the mid-1990s have made their way into northeastern Oregon, initially taking up residency in Wallowa County. Since the first documented depredation in May 2010, life in this scenic valley hasn't been the same.

It was this reality of what's becoming a group of ranch women to form Oregon Wolf Education in March 2011. Initially a group of five, these women didn't feel the issue was being dealt with truthfully,

Identification characteristics of wolves and coyotes

Remember, wolf pups in mid-summer and fall can closely resemble coyotes, and it can be difficult to tell them apart. While hunting coyote in wolf country, you should not shoot unless you are sure of your target.

COYOTES:

- Weight: 15-30 pounds
- Shoulder Height: 1½ feet
- Snout/Muzzle: long and pointed
- Ears: long and pointed

Taller, pointed ears; narrow pointed face and muzzle.

Adult coyotes are up to 1½ feet at shoulder



Adult coyotes are up to 4 feet long.

Adult coyote track about 2½ inches long

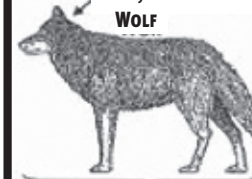
2¼ inches wide



WOLVES:

- Weight: 70-100 pounds
- Shoulder Height: 2½ Feet
- Snout/Muzzle: large and blocky
- Ears: short and rounded

Shorter, rounder ears; broad, blocky face and muzzle.



Adult wolves are up to 2½ feet tall at shoulder.

Adult wolves are up to 6 feet long.

Adult wolf track about 5 inches long

4 inches wide



Source: Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife

and they wanted the public to know the ranchers' side of the story.

All members have experience with this issue firsthand, having been affected by this predator through their own close encounters, depredations and missing livestock.

"Our goal is to educate people on how the invasion of the Canadian gray wolf is affecting our lives," relays Kerry Tienhaara of Joseph, Ore.

The group's first undertaking was to address a billboard unfavorable to ranchers that was put up near LaGrande on eastbound Hwy. 82, which leads into the secluded northeastern county.

Ramona Phillips of Joseph, Ore., explains that after that billboard came down, in less than two days, the ranch women asked if they could put another up.

"Within a matter of days, I had enough money to put up a billboard that said, 'Wolves are protected: Why not cows, people and private property rights?' It generated a huge response."

This helped these women form the idea of educating people in a positive way about the wolf issue.

"It's so crazy how we came together, but we really liked the idea of five women ranchers telling our personal stories," Phillips relays. They are now known as the educational arm of their Wallowa County Stockgrowers.

Ranching realities uncut

Working with a shoestring budget, the group's second undertaking was a video documenting the realities of the



PHOTO BY KIM HOLT

Picturesque Wallowa County is located in the far northeast corner of the state, bordered by Washington and Idaho. It has a population of 7,000, and agriculture is a substantial part of its economic base. It also hosts the Eagle Cap, the state's largest wilderness area.

misunderstood Canadian gray wolf in the midst of Wallowa County ranch country. The video is available online at www.oregonwolfeducation.org.

Videographer Marc Bales was on the frontlines from March through July 2011, shooting everything from wildlife to wolves, the ranchers and their efforts and dealings with ODFW, and the investigations of livestock depredations on their private lands.

A powerful tool that is real, raw

and unrehearsed, the video unveils the frustration experienced by these stewards whose hands are pretty much tied in trying to protect their own animals, even on private property. The members of Oregon Wolf Education — Tienhaara, Phillips, Lori Schaafsma and Connie Dunham — show the video at presentations they make to various audiences at every opportunity.

"The video always opens people up to questions," Tienhaara accounts. "We

can talk and talk and talk, but that video is more powerful than any words can say."

She adds, "I've yet to hear a negative comment, though some blogs have called it one-sided. But it's the truth, it's reality."

Wallowa County ranchers like Nash and Denny Johnson have experienced this reality in depredations they've incurred in both timber and on open, rolling country, from the nearby Imnaha wolf pack. The Nashes of Joseph had one of the county's

(Continued on page 28)

How Do Wolves Affect You? (from page 27)

first kills, and continue to have more than their share of losses, like the calf named Emily.

Amid other stock losses, Johnson lost a 4-year-old black Angus bull, a purchase from Thomas Angus Ranch in the nearby Baker Valley. The bull died quickly from a muscle trauma infection. In the video, Johnson notes to ODFW that his herd had become increasingly aggressive toward dogs and horses — a classic sign of wolf presence (see page 33) — and that he hadn't lost a bull in his 32 years of ranching.

Information like this, coupled with a veterinary evaluation — which noted the bull had suffered some kind of muscle trauma to the right foreleg consistent with something grabbing and pulling — isn't evidence enough for ranchers to be compensated for losses, as the video shows.

"It's possible there could have been wolves around here that chased it and caused it to tear that muscle," was an ODFW response. The investigators needed teeth marks to confirm the trauma was wolf-inflicted. Their call: "possible-unknown," which equals zero compensation for Johnson who, like Nash and other area ranchers, is being forced to bear the costs of government-introduced wolves on private property.

Sharing their story

Facts like these are hard to dispute when viewing this video, very real for even Hollywood itself. No matter, Phillips says their educational group does try to stay positive with their presentations.

"It's really important that we not go in confrontational and attack mode," she shares. "We are very big on being factual because we have found the other side to just grab facts out of the air. When we give presentations we say, 'How do wolves affect you? This is how wolves affect us.'"

Phillips and her husband haven't lost an actual animal yet. Still, she says, "we figure we have incurred some \$10 to \$15,000 from added expenses due to the wolf. I ask audiences, 'If you had \$10,000 come out of your pocket, would you be so happy to have the wolf here?' It does make a difference if you can make them think about that."

Like others, the Phillipses now check their cows more often, especially when they receive an ODFW text message saying that wolves have been located nearby, or when a school bus driver calls. Recently, one driver called saying she sighted a wolf eating on a carcass close to their grazing land.

"This is the kind of crazy thing we live with — a school bus driver can see one just off the road," Phillips remarks.

Most of their grazing land is very open, so wolves are highly visible. While they've not yet experienced a depredation, she says, "We've just been lucky, and I'm always waiting for that luck to run out. Where my brother, Todd, is in heavy timber, it's a whole different ball game," she says.

She adds, "We're living with them now. The hard thing is, [environmentalists] don't want to take out any wolves at all, or acknowledge there is a problem," even though the Imnaha pack has a preference for and is training its pups on beef.

"I carry binoculars with me all the time. You're not looking for just a sick calf anymore. You're looking for so many different things — hawks and crows circling," Phillips says. Coyotes are no longer taken for granted. "Now if you see coyotes, a wolf could be around or you might question, 'Is that a coyote?'" They're also careful with their dogs.

Phillips says they didn't realize, at first, that wolves had been crossing for quite some time on their place until the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) Wildlife Services agent pointed it out. Just two days prior, their granddaughter had

been a distance away from them with the dogs.

"It gave me chills," she says, not aware of the danger at the time. "If they had gone after our dogs and our granddaughter had been in the middle of it, what would have happened?"

It requires a new way of thinking, she adds.

The wolves have no fear of humans, says Phillips, and that in itself can be a source of problems.

Tienhaara's family lost a calf and had another attacked by wolves. Her daughter nursed the injured calf back from an awful infection, but the calf had to be salvaged as beef, and the usually docile mother cow had to be sold.

"You couldn't get within 50 yards of her," Tienhaara relays of the cow's disposition after the attack. "The attack just freaked her out."

It's "devastating" to lose animals to wolves no matter how many cows you have, she notes. "Wolves are not playful, spiritual characters as portrayed in Disney movies." They are predators that will hunt for sport or food, and chase and kill by instinct.

Protecting private property, livelihoods

While funding is challenging to secure for the Oregon Wolf Education project, Tienhaara, Phillips, Schaafsma and Dunham are dedicated to keeping the

(Continued on page 30)

Bridging the urban-rural divide

Life-broadening experiences are often the best teachers, and this is certainly the case with a program known as the 4-H Urban-Rural Exchange, sponsored annually by Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service.

Its goal is to help bridge the gap of understanding between rural eastern and urban western Oregon. It uses kids as a catalyst to foster understanding, first and foremost, about the use and management of natural resources, including grazing, logging, wilderness and wildlife.

Interestingly, this program was born out of the wolf issue when, in 2005 at a public Fish and Wildlife hearing, Portland urban youth took a stand in defense of wolves. From the concern voiced by ranchers, 4-H ultimately stepped in and the Urban-Rural Exchange was born one year later.

The program invites kids from Portland's Sunnyside Environmental Middle School to live and work alongside rural host families in three rural Oregon counties, including Wallowa.

It provides these kids, often exposed to one-sided viewpoints on rural natural resource use, a venue to walk in the shoes of families who are stewards of land and livestock. In exchange, rural youth are invited to visit the city, and to learn about renewable programs from an urban perspective.

More than 600 urban and rural Oregonians have participated in this five- to six-day exchange program since it began in 2006. As one would expect, OSU reports that a four-year evaluation found significant changes in knowledge and attitudes among both youth and adult participants.

Wallowa County has built a tradition of kids coming and going and the exchange is "a very well-known thing here," shares Deb Schreiber, OSU Wallowa County Extension Agent. "The kids that visit from the Sunnyside Environmental Middle School are looking for an experience. They're in seventh and eighth grade for the most part, are bright and are coming to find out what it's like to live in a world that is totally different from what they're used to."

Schreiber, who oversees the exchange in her county, says, "Probably the little things are the most impressionable to them — the awareness of the distance of living in nowhere."

She adds, "The whole thing started out because of the wolf issue, but we concentrate on the differences between urban and rural, especially natural resource issues."

Ramona and Charlie Phillips, Joseph, Ore., have served as host to five girls. Ramona has high praises for the program and students they've hosted. "We really enjoyed them. I think it's very worthwhile."

She says a year after one of their girls visited, her mother and brother also came on the exchange. The mother told Ra-



Emily, a student from Sunnyside Environmental Middle School in Portland, Ore., tags "Emily," a heifer calf born on her Wallowa County host family's ranch in spring 2012.

mona that the Phillipses had made a "huge impact" in her daughter's life.

Todd and Angie Nash have also served as hosts since the program's inception. Angie says the kids shadow Todd. "They are right with him, feeding, doing whatever he does."

Last spring, exchangees Emily and Anna experienced calving and spent two days helping trail the Nash herd to summer range. Todd also lets each student who visits tag a calf with his or her own name. "The girls love it," Angie assures.

Emily tagged a black heifer calf with her name (see photo), while Anna tagged a calf whose mother wore a GPS collar for a wolf interaction study.

Given the wolf issue within the county, it is something that ranchers like the Nash family try to show and explain to the kids. The Nash's deal with wolves firsthand, as their herd has been under pressure from the infamous Imnaha wolf pack for several years.

Students on the exchange leave with a whole new perspective for rural life and eastern Oregon. Nearly five months later, Emily was reminded once again about the realities that ranchers face each day in Wallowa County.

When Angie messaged Emily to tell her that her calf, Emily, had fallen victim to the wolves, she was "really sad," Angie recalls.

She adds, "The exchanges show these students that we're willing to try to learn and are working to find new solutions." Programs like this exchange are critical to bridging the urban-rural divide to discover and share understanding.

How Do Wolves Affect You? *(from page 28)*

educational effort going. They have video banked for a second documentary and plan to share the story of Emily the calf and the realities of wolf-livestock interactions with those in western Oregon, namely the Portland area.

Since May 2011, Tienhaara has been the group's lead person for the weekly

wolf report on Willowa County's KWVR Radio, assisted by Phillips.

"You can't believe the amount of people who comment about the reports," Tienhaara remarks. "There is lots of support out there; it's just getting people aware."

Conversations they've struck with

local listeners indicate that people — even in their agriculture-based county and communities — don't fully understand ranching. As a result, the group plans to expand its reports to include awareness for both the wolf and the profession.

It's this group's belief that the Canadian gray wolf issue is about the taking of personal and private property rights. They say, "We need to be able to protect our

rural lifestyle, livestock, big game and our private property rights, which we have seen eroded away in other states."

Tienhaara's family also has ties to the timber industry, and she hasn't forgotten how environmentalists used the northern spotted owl against that industry.

"We watched everything get compromised away," she remarks, saying Willowa County used to have four mills that paid family wages, and now it has none. "I want people to wake up. We have to stop compromising. We have a right to protect our private property and livelihoods.

"Regardless of whether you may own a single goldfish or 1,000 head of cattle, those who still place a value on individual rights and property rights should be paying attention to the Canadian gray wolf issue. It does affect each of us."

On Sept. 13, as Phillip's radio report drew to a close, she questioned:

"After writing this report, I was just notified that ODFW upgraded Emily's kill to a probable, so Todd Nash will get half of her worth in compensation. What does it take to get a confirmed? Wolves howling nearby and approaching the investigators like the Baker [County] cow that was killed?"

"This is Ramona Phillips, thanking KWVR and our listeners."



Editor's Note: View the video, "Possible/Unknown" and listen to archived Oregon Canadian Gray Wolf Reports at www.oregonwolfeducation.org. Another website that further sheds light on the wolf issue and this predator in Willowa County, the Rocky Mountain Region and around the globe is www.lifewithwolves.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH & WILDLIFE

Ramona and Charlie Phillips still see signs of wolves and hear them howl on land right behind their house. In early fall, about 6 miles from Joseph, while salting cows, Ramona almost stepped on a wolf track she describes as "big." She reports that the difference between coyote and wolf tracks are "night and day," and their 9-year-old granddaughter knows the difference. As this ODFW photo shows, wolf tracks are usually twice the size of coyote tracks, with adult wolf tracks measuring about 5 in. long by 4 in. wide. Adult gray wolves stand up to 2.5 feet (ft.) tall at the shoulder and are 6 ft. long. By comparison, adult coyotes stand up to 1.5 ft. at the shoulder and are up to 4 ft. long with taller, pointed ears.