



Reducing Conflicts Between Dogs and Wolves in Idaho

Idaho and wolves:

Wolves once ranged throughout much of North America, but by the early 1900's had been eliminated from most of their range in the lower 48 states.

Wolves were reintroduced into central Idaho in 1995 and 1996 by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as an "experimental non-essential population" under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since that time, wolves have increased in numbers until the USFWS proposed delisting wolves from the ESA list in early 2003. Due to legal challenges and other delays, delisting may take several years. As an interim measure until wolves are delisted, the USFWS proposed making changes to the way wolves were managed under Section 10(j), by making the rule more flexible for livestock operators and dog owners. On February 7, 2005, the new 10(j) rule came into effect in Idaho south of Interstate 90, and in parts of Montana.

This brochure is intended to provide information to dog owners that may help them avoid or reduce the likelihood of conflicts with wolves, and when and where dog owners may be able to kill a wolf attacking their dog.

Wolf biology and behavior:

Wolves are highly social animals, and the family structure is focused around the pack. Packs typically consist of a breeding pair—the "alpha male and alpha female"—and their young from previous years. Pack size doesn't vary much between years because the wolves that either leave or die each year are replaced by newborn pups.

Wolves breed in late winter, and subsequently give birth to an average of 4-5 pups in April. The pups are born in a den dug by the breeding female, around which the pack localizes. Wolf pups spend their first 6-8 weeks at the den, and are weaned at around 6 weeks of age. Once they begin eating meat, the pups are fed by adult members of the pack, which carry partly digested meat back from kills to regurgitate for the young.

As the pups become older the pack typically moves them from the den to "rendezvous sites", which are usually wet meadow areas within a pack's



photo by Jason Husseman



photo by Steve Nadeau

territory where the adults can leave the pups while they go off to hunt. Wolves may use several rendezvous sites during the summer months until the pups are big and strong enough to travel full-time with the pack (generally by late Sept. or Oct.). However, because they typically spend several weeks at a rendezvous site, they are generally very easily identified by the following sign:

- numerous tracks and scat (both adult and pup)
- bones brought back from kills
- matted grass near streams or in meadows with timbered cover nearby
- well worn trails and bed sites in grass
- howling of adults and pups (pups sound "yippy", or coyote-like)

Why wolves and dogs can have conflicts:

Wolves are by nature extremely territorial, and have developed ritualistic behaviors such as scent-marking and howling to mark their boundaries and indicate their strength to neighboring packs. Wolves also guard their territory and recent kills from other canids, including coyotes and domestic dogs. This territorial behavior stems from the need of wolves to maintain a sufficient food supply and decrease competition from other meat eaters. Because humans and their pets don't typically understand or recognize this complex system of wolves' sound, sign, and smell, they may place their pets in harm's way without realizing it. There are things we can do to reduce the chance of conflicts.

What you can do to minimize conflicts:

While it's impossible to completely eliminate wolf-dog conflicts in wolf habitat, there are several precautions that one can take when walking dogs or hunting with hounds.

When walking dogs:

- Keep your dog on a leash when you are walking in wolf habitat if possible—dogs running loose, away from people may attract wolves
- If you let your dog run loose, bring a leash so you can restrain your dog if you encounter wolves or wolf sign
- Be able to recognize wolf sign: wolves are particularly territorial around den/rendezvous sites and kills, so knowing how to recognize the signs associated with these areas will help avoid them
- If you live near wolves, kennel your dogs or bring them in at night - wolves are most active during the evening and early morning, and most conflicts with domestic dogs occur at this time. Also, don't leave food out that may attract wolves, bears or other unwanted guests
- Make noise and/or place a bell on the dog collar to alert wolves that humans are associated with the dog; wolves are more likely to avoid contact with a dog when they are aware of humans nearby

Hunting with dogs:

Hound hunting in wolf habitat is inherently risky, given the fact that trailing dogs run loose away from the people who would ordinarily deter wolves. However, there are steps that houndsmen can take to minimize hound-wolf conflict. Researchers investigating mountain lion ecology in Yellowstone National Park used hounds to capture lions in the park for over 8 winters*. Over the course of 150-plus lion captures in an area with some of the highest densities of wolves, they did not have a single conflict with wolves. Researchers and managers suggest the following to minimize hound-wolf interactions:

- Survey an area for wolf sign prior to releasing dogs; don't turn hounds loose if fresh wolf sign is found or wolves are heard howling nearby
- Release hounds only on fresh sign—shorter chases result in less time dogs are away from the safety of people

* Information provided by Researcher Toni Ruth of the Wildlife Conservation Society.



photo by Russ Kiefer

Bells placed on hunting dogs may reduce the likelihood of encounters with wolves.

- Yell or make noise when releasing hounds and going to the tree to announce your presence to wolves that may be in the area
- Get to the tree as quickly as possible—barking, unattended dogs may attract wolves
- Leash dogs at the tree to prevent them from splitting and pursuing other cats
- Some have suggested the use of bells or beeper collars to emit a non-natural sound that indicates the hounds are not wild canids
- Avoid releasing dogs at baits or kill sites recently visited by wolves. When looking for bear or lion sign at a bait or carcass, make sure to also look for wolf tracks
- Bird hunters working in timbered wolf habitat for forest grouse can reduce chance of conflict by keeping dogs within view, placing a bell or beeping collar on wider ranging dogs, talking loudly to the dog or other hunters, using whistles, and otherwise controlling the dog so that it stays close to the hunter so that wolves nearby would be able to associate the dog with a human; place the dog on a leash if wolves or fresh sign are seen

What you can do to protect your dog:

Currently wolves are protected under the ESA. However, the USFWS recently published new rules that allow take of wolves that harass or attack livestock or dogs on private property, known as the "10(j)" rules. Under the new 10(j) rules, landowners, outfitters, and permittees on private property or grazing allotments can legally kill wolves

“attacking (killing, wounding, or biting) or in the act of attacking (actively chasing, molesting, harassing) their livestock (includes livestock herding & guarding animals) or dogs.” However, the taking of a wolf must be reported within 24 hours and the injured or dead livestock or dog and any other evidence must be evident to verify that a wolf attack was imminent. Furthermore, where confirmed wolf depredations of livestock or dogs on private land or grazing allotments have occurred, and are likely to occur again based on the continued presence of wolves, the private landowner or grazing allotment permittee may be issued a “shoot-on-sight” permit. Keep in mind that it is only legal for the land owner, outfitter, or permittee to shoot wolves that harass or attack dogs on private land or grazing allotments—**it will remain illegal to shoot a wolf attacking pet dogs or hunting hounds on public land.**



Keeping hounds leashed until a fresh track is found will reduce the length of the chase and decrease the likelihood of dog-wolf encounters.

Identifying wolf sign:

Because wolves tend to travel the same trails that people do, wolf sign can often be found if wolves are nearby. The following will help you distinguish wolf sign from other animal sign:

Scat: Wolf droppings or “scat” can be distinguished from other canid scat based on size and content. Scat is generally 1-1½” in diameter with tapered ends. In contrast, coyote scat is much smaller (typically less than 1” in diameter). Wolf scat usually contains elk and deer hair, as well as shards of bones. Wolf “meat scats” are typically deposited after a fresh kill and are loose and tar-like in consistency.

Travel and tracks: Wolf tracks are generally much larger than dog tracks usually 3 ½ -4 inches wide by 4-5 inches long and with distinct claw marks. When wolves are traveling, they usually are more “business like” than a dog and travel in a straight

line, while a dog will meander back and forth. The distance between one set of wolf tracks and the next set is usually greater than 26 inches and likely more than 30. Also, wolves tend to have narrow chests, thus their tracks appear almost in a straight line. Mountain lion tracks in comparison will usually not have any claw marks, and tracks will appear rounder. Their stride is usually shorter than 26 inches, and because they have broader chests, their tracks will not appear in a straight line. Also, when a pack of wolves are traveling together in the snow, they will often walk directly in each others tracks so that there appears to be only one animal.

If you have a wolf-dog conflict or see a wolf:

- If your dog is injured or killed by wolves, report the incident as soon as possible to your local Fish and Game Officer or Regional Office, or to USDA Wildlife Services. If you kill a wolf attacking your dog, mark the location and protect the evidence of the attack as best you can, and you must report it within 24 hours to:

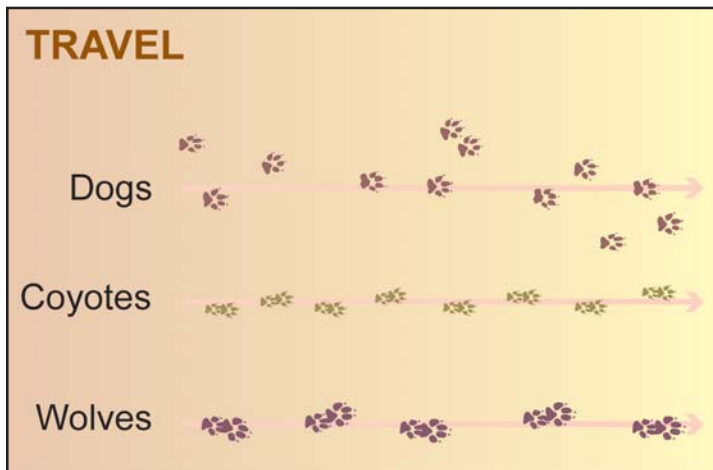
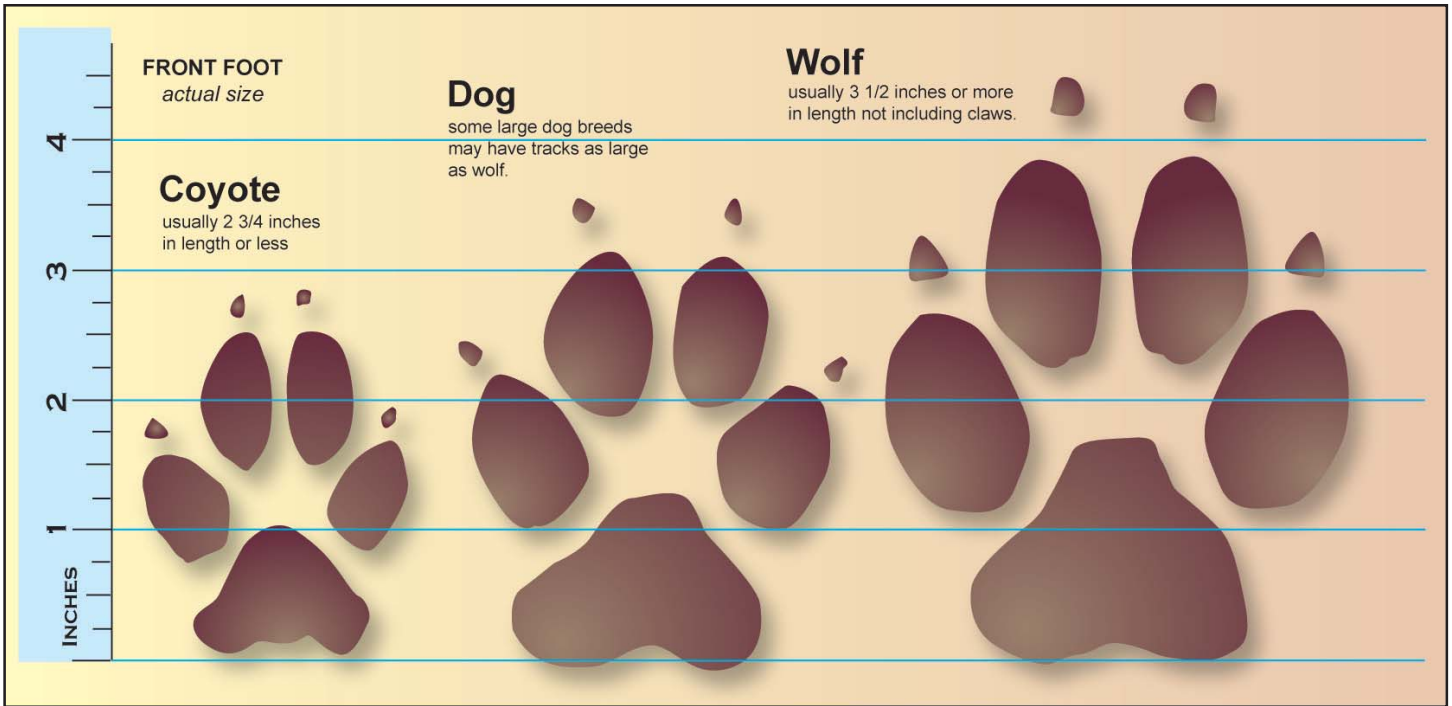
To report legal wolf take and wolf- dog interactions, :

Idaho Fish and Game Regional Offices at:

Headquarters	208-334-3700
Panhandle Region	208-769-1414
Clearwater Region	208-799-5010
Southwest Region	208-465-8465
McCall Subregion	208-634-8137
Magic Valley Region	208-324-4350
Southeast Region	208-232-4703
Upper Snake Region	208-525-7290
Salmon Region	208-756-2271:

USDA Wildlife Services: Toll Free 1-866-487-3297

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game needs your help in documenting areas of wolf activity to accurately estimate the number of wolf packs in the state. Please report any sightings of wolves or wolf sign to <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/wolves/report.cfm>. And visit our wolf webpage at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/wolves/>



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