

**Wood River Wolf Project**  
**Applicant: International Wildlife Coexistence Network (Fiscal Agent)**  
**Staff Report to LAB on Expedited Review of Pre-Application**

To: Levy Advisory Board (LAB) and Tom Bergin  
From: Wendy Pabich, LWWP Program Coordinator  
Date: November 7, 2022

**LAB Expedited Project Review Process**

The Applicant seeks funding to support 2023 summer field season activities. The Wood River Wolf Project (WRWP) has been relying on federal funding through the Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC) and recently learned that this federal funding may not be available for the 2023 season. The Applicant therefore seeks Expedited Review of the Project. The LAB may consider invoking the Expedited Review Process as described in the attached Guidelines (approved May 1, 2014).

Staff concludes the Project meets the goals of the Levy and criteria of the LWWP. The size of the grant request (\$42,724), however, is larger than other requests that have been determined to constitute "small grants" appropriate for Expedited Review. The LAB should consider the merits of this request and if it chooses to proceed with an Expedited Review, the expectation is that the Pre-Application would be considered in place of a Full Application and the review process would ensue during the LAB meeting.

**Project Summary**

With 2 seasonal staff, Wood River Wolf Project (WRWP) works with 5 sheep operators and approximately 16 herders to effectively use 24-hour, non-lethal deterrents to keep wolves and other predators away from 18-12 bands of sheep grazing spanning numerous grazing allotments (Exhibit B) on 286,000 acres of public lands (Exhibit C) in Blaine County. The Forest Service's Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) require each of the five producers to partner with the Wood River Wolf Project. Emphasis will be on the Ketchum Ranger District, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and other areas within Blaine County south of Galena Summit. Adjustments will be made to routing or bedding as the need arises to head off problems. Meetings will be scheduled as necessary to assess or prevent potential problems.

In partnership with Blaine County and the Idaho Department of Fish & Game, WRWP will work to foster a non-lethal approach to preventing domestic sheep and wolf mortality. Human presence (flashing lights, noise makers, guard dogs, and camping at night with the bands) has proven to be the most important deterrent to livestock depredation and encourages wolves and other predators to focus on their natural prey rather than livestock. Using these methods, the Project may protect up to 16,000 sheep during the field season.

The WRWP requests \$42,724 or 21% of a total project cost of \$203,703 from LWWP to pay 50% of the cost of one seasonal contract field technician, 50% of the cost of a light duty truck, 20 cameras, and 5 banding kits. The remainder of project costs will be covered by Blaine County, 2022 reimbursement from OSC, and private donors. To date, \$70,000 in matching funds have been secured.

Lack of support from the Office of Species Conservation for the 2023 field season may hinder the Project's capacity to offer the same quality and quantity of help to the

community. Without these services, sheep predation costs to livestock producers will likely rise, increasing the likelihood that lethal action will be taken against wolves in the County.

LWWP funding will offset field expenses, support transportation costs, and help the Project engage local young leaders through their Student Camera Project. In addition, Program is seeking to purchase a safe, field appropriate vehicle for field staff to travel the thousands of miles of remote backcountry Forest Service roads in the project area. In the past, the Program has rented vehicles for the duration of the field season (\$10,000 for 4 months) but finds this to be an unsustainable continued cost.

The project has been financially supported by the Blaine County Commissioners during its 15 seasons operating in Blaine County because it:

- Supports the county's policies to value and coexist with wildlife and to maintain our agricultural heritage.
- Demonstrates that the use of non-lethal deterrents keeps wolves away from sheep bands on public lands and is more effective than lethal methods.
- Involves local, state, and federal stakeholders and interested parties so solutions are developed collaboratively.

### **Expected Conservation Outcomes**

LWWP funding will allow the WRWP to become more sustainable in reducing the number of sheep killed by predators in the project area in 2023. Throughout its 15 years of operation, the program has shown great success in mitigating predator-livestock interactions, protecting up to 16,000 sheep during the field season.

### **Alignment with LWWP Goals**

Of the eight Primary Conservation Goals set out in BCC Resolution 2008-71 and the LWWP Program Guide, this project appears to address the following three goals:

- Preserve working farms and ranches, agricultural lands, natural areas and important open spaces,
- Protect and preserve wildlife, habitat, and transit and migration corridors, and
- Support public/private partnerships.

In addition to directly protecting wildlife, by maintaining the economic viability of sheep ranching, the project supports keeping land in ranching and agriculture. For example, Lava Lake Land and Livestock (Brian Bean) and the Flat Top Ranch (John Peavey) are two livestock producers participating in the Wood River Wolf Project and maintaining ranching operations. The Peavey's Flat Top Ranch received an early LWWP grant to purchase a conservation easement on their Little Wood property and Lava Lake Land and Livestock continues to be a pioneer in land restoration and the use of non-lethal deterrents to protect sheep from wolves and other predators.

### **Minimum Criteria for LWWP Funding**

All criteria must be met at Full Application stage.

- 1) Blaine County location? Yes.

- 2) Serves 1+ primary Levy goals of protecting land, water or wildlife? *Yes, the Project protects land, and wildlife.*
- 3) Landowner committed lands for the project? *Yes.*
- 4) Qualified entity willing to take responsibility for the completion, maintenance and enforcement of the project? *Yes.*
- 5) Matching funds being sought? *Yes.*
- 6) Lasting conversation value sought? *As is common with non-acquisition projects, this question requires LAB discussion. The Project continues to be replicated elsewhere and it supports ongoing Blaine County policies advocating for coexistence with wildlife.*

### **Analysis**

This project represents an important effort to actively protect wildlife in a challenging context (i.e., state policies that encourage lethal management of wolves). Given that these state policies are contrary to the stated desires of Blaine County officials and many citizens, this project represents a way our community can support local values. While the project differs from many previously-funded efforts in that it focuses on behavioral strategies that, by definition, are more ephemeral than “shovel-in-the-ground” projects, these strategies have been shown to be the most effective deterrents. In the end, wildlife management is about behavior—human and animal—and therefore, it is no surprise that behavioral solutions seem to be the most effective.

### **LAB Considerations**

Given the potential for a loss of federal funding for the Project, the LWWP would play an important role in ensuring the continuity and continued success of the WRWP this coming season. In the future, however, it may be that providing ongoing programmatic support for this (or any) Project is outside the capacity and goals of the LWWP. In this case, the Applicant should be encouraged to develop a plan for sustainable operational support.

The guidelines for Expedited Review ask that the following be considered by the LAB when deciding whether to activate the Expedited Process. Staff comments are incorporated below:

- Whether the project appears to meet the levy goals generally. **[Yes.]**
- Whether the project meets the six minimum criteria. **[Yes.]**
- The completeness of the Project’s application materials, which must identify all permits or formal approvals required by Blaine County and other entities prior to implementing the project, and the status and expected timeline of each. **[Sufficient.]**
- Whether the BCC has directed the LAB to consider the project under EP. **[No.]**
- Whether the director of the County’s Land Use Dept. has offered an opinion. **[No.]**
- The time-pressure or urgency of the matter, e.g., a natural disaster. **[The WRWP may lose federal funding and is under pressure to secure funds to offset this federal contribution.]**
- The complexity of the project. **[Staff assessment is that the project is fairly straightforward.]**

- The amount of money being asked of the LWWP. **[The ask is larger than previous projects deemed “small grants”. The LAB should evaluate this question in its consideration of whether to invoke the Expedited Process.]**
- The existence of, capacity of, and LWWP history with, any Partners. **[The LWWP has previously funded WRWP and the BCC has supported the project for 15 seasons.]**
- The degree to which LWWP funds will be leveraged. **[79% of project costs will be borne by other entities].**
- The degree to which other entities have reviewed or will review the project. **[It is assumed that all other funding entities, including BCC, have previously reviewed the WRWP.]**
- The risks of project failure and the LWWP’s ability to mitigate them. **[Risks are unclear and it seems LWWP has limited ability to mitigate them.]**
- Whether the Program Coordinator has been involved in the project and can provide the LAB with analysis. **[This Staff Report is a result of analysis by the Program Coordinator.]**
- Whether consideration of the project under EP will meet the LAB’s quorum requirements for approval of a Full Application. **[Yes.]**
- Any effects that pursuing the EP or the project may have on other project applications in process. **[None.]**