



Understanding Wolves

Wolf Behavior and Habituation

Normal wolf behavior can easily be confused as habituation; becoming too comfortable with humans.

Wolves are often described as shy and fearful of humans. Consequently, when a person sees a wolf pup lying in the middle of a dirt road or an adult wolf trails a person through the woods, he/she describes the wolf as exhibiting non-typical behavior or "habituated".

Examples of common wolf behavior:

- A wolf traveling on roads or trails, showing curiosity towards dogs, walking past houses in rural communities, or trailing behind people who get too close to a wolf den or rendezvous sites are all activities that describe normal wolf behavior.
- It is common to hear a wolf bark-howl in response to a person's presence near a den or rendezvous site. A barking wolf that appears to "stand its ground" is warning a person to stay out of the area and alerting the rest of the pack to a potential intrusion. When the person retreats, the wolf may follow the person at a distance to ensure the person has left the area and is no longer deemed a threat to the pups. This wolf is not habituated; protecting its pups from disturbance.
- A wolf that approaches a hunter, dressed in camouflage to hide his/her human appearance and mimicking the sound or scent of the species hunted, is not habituated. The wolf is investigating a potential, albeit fake, food source.
- An elk hanging in a hunting camp may attract a wolf to the campsite. The wolf smelled a natural food source. If the wolf stays on the outskirts of the campsite and leaves after it recognizes people, it is not habituated.

Wolves displaying behaviors such as rummaging through a campsite, approaching vehicles, and accepting food handouts are considered habituated. If a wolf rips up a tent or tears apart a backpack at a campsite, then it is habituated. Relatively few cases exist of humans being bitten or killed by wild wolves. In most situations, these wolves were sick, had become accustomed to eating from garbage dumps or were fed by people, thereby losing their natural fear of humans and associating humans with food.

Any wild animal can be dangerous, particularly if it is provoked, sick, injured, protecting its young, has become accustomed to people or has learned to associate



people with food. Follow the recommendations below to minimize human-wolf interactions.

Keep wolves wild

- *Never* feed wolves. Some examples include disposing of livestock scraps in areas accessible to wildlife, leaving garbage at a campsite, using a bait pile to get trail camera photographs, and tossing human food to a wolf.
- *Never* disturb wolf dens or rendezvous sites especially, between April and September.
- Secure pet food and garbage at residences.
- Keep dogs in a predator resistant kennel/fencing or inside, especially at night.
- Feeding deer, turkeys and other wildlife may encourage wolves to visit your property.
- Install strobe or motion sensor lights around your house and outbuildings.
- Utilize livestock husbandry practices that minimize potentials for wolf-livestock interactions such as fencing, strobe lights, moving sick/injured livestock to a secure location, and disposing of dead livestock so it is inaccessible to scavenging.

If you encounter a wolf:

- Do not approach the wolf.
- Leash your dog. Do not allow it to chase or interact with the wolf.
- Back away slowly. Leave the area. Allow the wolf space especially if you have stumbled upon a den, rendezvous or kill site.

If you feel threatened by a wolf:

- Stay calm. Do not run. Carnivores may instinctively chase something that runs.
- Use loud noises such as an air horn, yelling, or a whistle to scare wolves.
- Make yourself larger by raising and waving your arms, especially if you are wearing camouflage clothing.
- Bear spray may be an effective tool if within range.
- Throw objects such as sticks.
- Keep direct eye contact.

To report a wolf sighting, please visit the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/species-recovery/gray-wolf/observations>.

To report unusual wolf behavior, call 1-877-933-9847.

Additional information regarding gray wolf conservation and management in Washington may be found at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/species-recovery/gray-wolf>