



WesternWildlife.org



## Keeping your Dog Safe in Wolf Country

Absent from Washington State for over 70 years, gray wolves are once again present in Washington, descendants of wolves that naturally dispersed from nearby packs in Idaho and Canada. Wolves pose very little threat to humans. Wolf aggression towards humans is very rare, and attacks even rarer. There are no recorded incidents of attacks on humans by wild wolves in Washington State. However, wolves **will** attack domestic dogs in certain situations and taking the right precautions can keep your dog safe from wolf or coyotes.

Domestic dogs and gray wolves are actually the same species: *Canis lupus*. Coyotes are closely related, but a separate species. This close genetic relationship means that wolves, and sometimes coyotes, view dogs as competition and will attack them when the circumstances are right.

In their natural environment wolves defend territories against other wolves; it is common for wolves to kill other wolves in territorial disputes. Wolves may also be aggressive toward domestic dogs. Although encounters between a single wolf and a domestic dog sometimes result in play behavior, encounters between several wolves and a dog usually result in the wolves aggressively attacking the dog. Wolves may act aggressively towards dogs even when people are present. However, the aggression is aimed at the dog, and not people.

## Protecting Your Dog while Camping, Hiking or Hunting

Although many people enjoy taking their dogs on camping or hunting trips in wilderness areas where the dogs are allowed to run free, dog owners must recognize that this practice places their pet at some additional level of risk. Dogs that are pursued by wolves or bears will probably try to retreat to their owner, thereby bringing the threat closer to the people. A safer, recommended practice is to maintain control of pets within sight of the owner during wilderness excursions. In addition, the following tips apply when traveling outdoors with your dog:

- Keep a clean campsite or hunting camp with food or waste stored well away from camp.
- If possible contain the dog in your tent or camper at night, or immediately outside, if that is not possible.
- Don't dispose of food by dumping into the campfire.

- Don't leave unwashed cooking utensils around your camp.
- Keep food in animal proof containers.
- Don't leave garbage unsecured.
- Don't cook food near your tent or sleeping area.
- Don't allow pets to freely roam away from your camp.
- Don't bury garbage, pack it out.
- Be alert for signs of wolf activity such as tracks, scat or scattered bones, and avoid camping near such areas.
- **Carry Bear Spray!** If your dog tangles with a wolf or bear, or is pursued by either, use the spray to defend your dog by deterring the attack. If your dog is actively being attacked, don't try to intervene, but Bear Spray, which contains a strongly pressurized volume of pepper, or capsaicin compounds, can be used to spray them both and break up the altercation. Your animal (as well as the attacking animal) will need some recovery time, but the effects of Bear Spray are non-lethal and temporary. Use of the spray when your animal is under attack can save it from life-threatening injury.

## Protecting your Dog at Home

**Sterilize your dog.** Wolves may be drawn to female dogs in heat, and male intact dogs may be driven by an urge to wander or could be lured by a female wolf. Not only is it important to keep your dog safe, it is also imperative that wolves and dogs not be allowed to interbreed. They can produce wolf-dog hybrid offspring, a pairing that is detrimental for wild wolves and wolf-dog hybrids do not make good pets!

If you are breeding dogs for your own purposes or to sell, extra precaution should be taken to keep the dogs safe. Keep female dogs indoors or kenneled when in heat, and always keep intact male dogs in a safe enclosure.

- Provide indoor shelter options for animals during hours of darkness. For example dog houses, sheds, or barns.
- Provide chain link fences around dog yards and overwinter livestock areas.
- Consider electric fences around dog yards and livestock areas.
- Install lights/motion detectors around dog yards and livestock areas.
- Clear brush to provide a perimeter clear of concealing vegetation around dog yards or livestock areas.
- Keep noisemakers on hand to haze away coyotes, wolves or bears that venture in the vicinity of your home or dog/livestock enclosure.
- Keep all animal feed in animal-proof containers or stored in sturdy sheds or barns.

**Do not provide food to any wild animals.** Harvested fruit. Feeding deer, turkeys, raccoons etc. may draw in predators posing a threat to your dog or livestock. Even bird feeders should be removed if predators are sighted in the vicinity.

### FOR MORE SAFETY INFORMATION:

<http://westernwildlife.org/gray-wolf-outreach-project>