

First, let me say that I think that the game has potential; I would not bother writing this analysis unless I thought so.

The rules are not very intuitive on a number of issues.

With how many wolves do players start? The first bullet under 'Order of Play' says "events your wolf can perform," which suggests that players start with one wolf. However, the Alpha Pair Tokens have a pair on one side and a single wolf on the other. Since the rules do not mention anything about gaining additional Alphas, this tends to suggest that players start with two Alpha wolves each. For the game I played, I assumed that players start with two Alpha wolves.

How many turns are in a season? (By turn, I mean each player taking one turn.) On the board, each season has a white space and a gray space, suggesting two turns per season. Also, the 'Raise Pups' action refers to the "first part of spring" and 'Set Up' refers to "the Spring white space." These references bolster the theory of two turns per season. However, the 'Order of Play' suggests that each turn is one season. Do you mean season as a turn (for which there would apparently be eight seasons in a game year) or do you mean there are the four traditional seasons in a year and each season consists of two turns each? For the game I played, I assumed that each season consists of two turns.

I played a four -player game. Since there are no means provided to differentiate the Alpha Pair Tokens, we colored each token. I will refer to the players by their color: red, green, white, and blue. (This is the order of play.) You should provide pre-colored tokens or include some other method of distinguishing among the Alpha Pair Tokens of the players.

Whenever you modify the rules you need to make certain that the rules are consistent; that a given change is reflected everywhere in the rules. According to the 'Game Elements' there should be four Season Cards; however, they are not otherwise mentioned in the rules. I assume that there were Season Cards in an earlier iteration but that they are no longer used. The 'Game Elements' also states that the Cattle Token is two sided. This is not true, at least of the current version of the game. In fact, you do not need a Cattle Token at all; since they do not move and do not have two states (normal/grazing vs. cautious/on guard), they can just be part of the board. Another thing, the rules refer to the two sides of the prey tokens as 'grazing' and 'on guard'; however, the actual tokens state 'normal' and 'cautious.' The description of the bison prey type refers twice to elk, like you copy-and-pasted the elk description but forgot to change elk to bison. For the 'Wolf Pack Actions,' you have an 'X' for each season wolves may perform a given action; however, the only action that cannot be performed every season is 'Raise Pups.'

Since there are only two years in a game, instead of 'year one' and 'year two' and recycling the seasons, I would just put two years worth of seasons along the side of the board (dividing each season into two turns if that is your intent). This way, you would not need a Year Token, but you would not deprive players of any information. Also, the spaces for the Hunter Marker should be bigger.

Here is how the game I played progressed:

First turn: Red rolled a 'one' and thereby could not reach any prey the first turn. Green went after one of the elk and White went after the other elk. (Green and White also went to the next space where their respective elk would travel next season. In this way, they would automatically be in the same space as the prey and would not need to move. This also meant that any other player would have to displace them before getting 'their' prey.) Blue went after the cattle and remained in the cattle space to make things difficult for Red. All players chose to raise pups.

Second turn: Red's only option to get food before the end of the season is to displace Blue and hunt cattle. (Since both elk are now cautious, four wolves are required to successfully hunt them and four wolves are required to hunt bison. Red consists of two Alpha wolves; the pups will not be grown until next season and Red has not successfully called for new pack members. For the first season, no pack can have more than three wolves; even if a call for new members is successful, it can only be attempted once per season. Since Red and Blue have equal numbers, each player rolls a die. (Blue had not successfully called for new members and, I assume, pups do not count.) Red lost and (presumably) both Red and Blue lost their pups. The season ends and Red, without food, is reduced to one Alpha.

(So, during the first season of a four player game: two players will get the elk and the other two players must 'share' or fight over the cattle.)

Summer season: Green and White 'monopolize' the elk. Blue has no food options except cattle. Red has no food options at all. Since Red now consists of one wolf, it cannot attempt to displace Blue (who still has two wolves). At the end of the season, Red has no food and is eliminated from the game.

Rest of the game: Blue, moving after green and white, must rely upon cattle for prey. By the time the first year has ended, Blue has been destroyed by the Hunter Threat. Since the Hunter Threat Bar did not reach one, Green and White are safe as long as they do not prey upon the cattle. (Of course, they do not need to prey upon the cattle; they each have their own private elk herds.) The second year consists of Green and White going through the motions of raising pups, calling for new members, preying upon elk, and moving along the elk trails.

I do not pretend to know more about wolf ecology than you. Perhaps this game is an accurate simulation of what happens to wolf packs. If your intent was to educate players about how dismal life in a wolf pack can be, you have succeeded. If, however, you want to provide players with an interesting game, you have some work to do.

You have two 'Notes for Future Polish.' I do not think that the second note about balancing the addition of members will have much of an effect. The options you present in the first note are where you need to focus your efforts (in my opinion).

First you say, "Find some elements other than having the larger wolf pack leads to victory." Instead of 'largest pack' you could determine the winner by who controls the largest territory. In my understanding of wolf behavior, most attacks of wolves against wolves are territorial disputes. An area control game where you can only be in one space at a time might be interesting. Also, instead of each player controlling a separate pack, what if each player started as a pup and, as the game progresses, each player attempts to become the next Alpha? There would be cooperation (for the good of the pack) and competition (for the victory condition of becoming Alpha). However, this might be an entirely different game.

Otherwise, you say, "[E]ven the playing field for making [the larger wolf pack leads to victory]." As the game currently stands, players are not making interesting decisions: they hunt the most convenient prey and try to increase the number of wolves in their pack.

You suggest cards in your 'Notes for Future Polish.' This might be the answer to 'evening the playing field' as well as allowing for interesting decisions. What if, instead of rolling dice to determine movement/actions, players drew cards -- a fixed number plus one per adult wolf? Each card could be used to move or attack (prey or wolves), giving different options for either -- an opportunity cost. This way, a player will not be penalized for a low roll for movement/action. Packs of the same size will have roughly equivalent options and so the start of the game will be more even. You can give smaller packs a break by allowing them to go before larger packs in a turn. Instead of (or in addition to) a card drawing mechanism, you had a card drafting mechanism, smaller packs could choose cards first. (Maybe having a larger pack would allow an increase in hand size.)

Other thoughts:

Using all of those tokens can get cumbersome. What if, aside from the map, each player had a separate 'pack status' board? Such boards could be used to track numbers of wolves in the pack, number of developing pups, and whether the pack has fed that season.

Except that packs can only raise pups in the first part of spring, there is no difference among the seasons. I think perhaps seasons may have had more of a difference in an earlier iteration of your game. Maybe you can revisit that or think of a new way to present seasonal differences. (What about a different movement/attack deck for each season?)

Perhaps larger packs should require more 'units' of food per season.

Your current board is divided into four terrain types: Plains, Highlands, Creek, and Delta. As of now, terrain differences do not affect the game. If you implement a movement/attack deck, perhaps bonuses and penalties could be different for each terrain on a given card.