TO THE HONORABLE DOCTOR BRADLEY SMITH, CHAIR OF THE WASHINGTON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION, DOCTOR JAMES UNSWORTH, DIRECTOR OF THE WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE, AND TO THE MEMBERS OF THE WASHINGTON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION:

We, your Memorialists, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Washington, in legislative session assembled, respectfully represent and petition as follows:

WHEREAS, The story of the recovery of the gray wolf in Washington, though still in its early chapters, is showing signs that suggest it will soon become the story of one of the most successful recoveries of an extirpated apex species in United States history; and

WHEREAS, Gray wolves are again roaming the ancient forests and mountains of the Pacific Northwest, establishing new packs, reclaiming old territories, and recovering faster in Washington than even the most optimistic projections expected; and

WHEREAS, The howl of the gray wolf in the Washington night, albeit a song of nature's resilience, is also a song of trepidation for those whose lives and livelihoods share the same landscape and who must dance in careful, balanced steps with the wolf; and

WHEREAS, The long-term, permanent recovery of the gray wolf in Washington requires not only the sensible management of the species, but also a careful balancing of the needs of the species with the needs, customs, and cultures of the communities that are neighbors to the wolf; and

WHEREAS, There is a geographic imbalance in the initial, and foreseeable, stages of wolf recovery that places an unproportioned burden on certain portions of the state, and the communities and citizens in those areas, to serve as the nursery for statewide wolf recovery; and

WHEREAS, Untold hours of labor, much of it volunteered, was spent by dedicated, hardworking, and well-meaning people to develop the existing wolf conservation and management plan under which the species is currently managed; and

WHEREAS, The existing wolf conservation and management plan, as important of a road map as it is towards directing wolf recovery, did not anticipate the current rate of recovery or lack of geographic diversity in the recovery pattern; and

WHEREAS, Changes to the wolf conservation and management plan may be needed to lessen the effect of the current uneven geographic density of wolf populations on rural communities, livestock producers, and the wolves themselves; and

WHEREAS, Treating the wolf conservation and management plan as a living document, and not the final word on recovery principles, by making small changes to its contents given current conditions would not only aid the wolf in its journey back across the great state of Washington, but also help to ensure that the social tolerance needed to support long-term recovery is secure and the story of wolf recovery is celebrated by all Washingtonians; and

WHEREAS, Relatively minor revisions to the wolf conservation and management plan, such as viewing recovery in terms of viable packs as opposed to breeding pairs, or counting success as having wolves in two out of three recovery zones, would make a tangible difference in public support for wolf recovery without jeopardizing the recovery itself; and

WHEREAS, The fish and wildlife commission has already been delegated the full authority, and incumbent responsibility, it needs to amend the wolf conservation and management plan as necessary to ensure the sustainable recovery of wolves in the context of sustainable rural communities demanded by all Washingtonians;

NOW, THEREFORE, Your Memorialists respectfully pray that the fish and wildlife commission:

(1) Embark on a revisiting of the wolf conservation and management plan, not to recreate or replace the results of the hard work contained within its pages, but to make amendments colored by the lessons learned since its adoption so that the plan itself may be a living document that is responsive to the management needs of the species, the customs and cultures of the affected communities, and the delicate balance that must be achieved between the two;

(2) Revisit the listing status assigned to the gray wolf by the commission and consider a regional change in listing status based on the health of gray wolf populations in the disproportionately affected areas of the state in the context of overall wolf populations in the greater Pacific Northwest and British Columbia; and

(3) Prepare a document that may be presented to the 2016 legislature that outlines a commitment, process, timeline, and scope of work for addressing the unintentional and perhaps unforeseen conflicts between unevenly spaced recovering wolf populations and their neighboring communities; a commitment that must be made if Washington is going to enjoy the mutually inclusive benefits of a vibrant wolf population and vibrant rural communities.

BE IT RESOLVED, That copies of this Memorial be immediately transmitted to the Honorable Doctor Bradley Smith, chair of the Washington fish and wildlife commission, Doctor James Unsworth, director of the Washington department of fish and wildlife, and the other members of the Washington fish and wildlife commission.