
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 1791

Brief Description: Requiring the department of fish and wildlife to manage wolf-related wildlife interactions using lethal means when certain conditions are satisfied.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Blake, Short and Condotta.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Conditions are identified under which the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is directed to use lethal means to manage wolf-related wildlife conflicts in wolf recovery zones where wolves are not federally protected and the WDFW has identified at least four wolf packs.

Hearing Date: 2/5/15

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) operates under a legislative mandate to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage the state's wildlife. Wildlife is defined as all species of the animal kingdom whose members exist in Washington in a wild state. This includes: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) has the authority to identify species that are seriously threatened with extinction and designate those species as endangered. Such a species classification must be requested by the Director of the WDFW (RCW 77.12.020). The Commission may only list a species as endangered, threatened, or sensitive solely on the basis of the biological status of the species being considered. This decision must be based on the preponderance of scientific data. Species may be classified when populations are in danger of failing, declining, or are vulnerable (WAC 232-12-297).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Once listed, the Commission must also rely on the preponderance of available scientific data when making delisting or reclassification decisions. A species may be delisted from endangered, threatened, or sensitive only when populations are, solely on the basis of the biological status of the species being considered, no longer in danger of failing, declining, are no longer vulnerable. A delisting process may be initiated by the WDFW directly or by a petition to the WDFW by an interested person that sets forth the scientific data and specific evidence supporting the delisting of the species (WAC 232-12-297).

The listing of a species by the Commission requires the creation of a management plan for the species. The management plan must identify target population objectives, reclassification criteria, an implementation plan, public education, and a species monitoring plan (WAC 232-12-297).

The gray wolf is listed as an endangered species under Washington law for the entirety of the State (WAC 232-12-014). The species is only listed as endangered under federal law in the western two-thirds of the state (areas west of Highways 97, 17 and 395). On December 3, 2011, the Commission approved a wolf conservation and management plan. According to the Commission, the plan has three key elements: recovery objectives, livestock protection, and wildlife protection.

The plan identifies three wolf recovery regions. The regions are the Eastern Washington region, the North Cascades region, and the Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast region. The plan's recovery objectives to allow the wolf to be removed from the state's endangered species list is based on target numbers and species distribution. Specifically, the gray wolf will be considered to be recovered if the WDFW documents 15 successful breeding pairs for three consecutive years which are distributed in such a way that each recovery zone is host to at least four breeding pairs.

The wolf management plan envisions lethal action against wolves to repeated depredation if it is documented that livestock have clearly been killed by wolves, non-lethal methods have been tried but failed to resolve the conflict, depredations are likely to continue, and there is no evidence of intentional feeding or unnatural attraction of wolves by the livestock owner. The plan directs the WDFW to consider lethal actions on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration factors such as: pack history and size, pattern of depredations, number of livestock killed, state listed status of wolves, and the extent of proactive management measures being used on the property.

Summary of Bill:

The WDFW is directed to use lethal means to manage wolf-related wildlife conflicts when certain conditions are met in wolf recovery zones where wolves are not federally protected and the WDFW has identified at least four wolf packs. The conditions under which lethal action must be taken include confirmation by the WDFW that wolves from the same pack were involved in at least two livestock depredations during the previous six-months, at least one animal was killed by wolves, there was no intentional feeding or other unnatural attraction of the wolves by the owner of the livestock, and the owner of the livestock appropriately employed at least one non-lethal prevention method.

The WDFW has the discretion to use lethal wolf management techniques under other circumstances.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.