

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5938

As of February 17, 2015

Title: An act relating to providing for the partial delisting of the gray wolf by the fish and wildlife commission.

Brief Description: Providing for the partial delisting of the gray wolf by the fish and wildlife commission.

Sponsors: Senators Dandel and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 2/18/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Role of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). DFW serves as manager of the state's fish and wildlife resources. Among other duties, DFW must protect, perpetuate, and establish the basic rules and regulations governing the harvest of fish and wildlife.

State Endangered Species Management Authority Generally. The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) has the statutory authority to identify species that are seriously threatened with extinction and designate those species as endangered.

Under this statutory authority, the Commission adopted rules providing that it may only designate a species as endangered, threatened, or sensitive on the basis of the biological status of the species being considered. This decision must be based on the preponderance of available scientific data. DFW must write a recovery plan for endangered and threatened species, and a management plan for sensitive species. These plans must identify target population objectives, reclassification criteria, an implementation plan, public education, and a species monitoring plan.

The rules also provide that a species may be delisted from endangered, threatened, or sensitive status only when populations are no longer in danger of failing, declining, or vulnerable. The Commission must rely on the preponderance of available scientific data when making delisting or reclassification decisions.

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.

Wolf Management in Washington State. Gray wolves are currently endangered under federal law in approximately the western two-thirds of the state, with the species having been federally delisted in the eastern one-third in 2011. Wolves are classified under state law as an endangered species throughout the state.

The wolf conservation and management plan (wolf plan) was adopted in December 2011. Its stated goals are to:

- restore the wolf population to a self-sustaining size and geographic distribution;
- manage wolf-livestock conflicts to minimize livestock losses while not negatively impacting recovery;
- maintain healthy ungulate populations; and
- develop public understanding of the conservation and management needs of wolves.

The wolf plan identifies three wolf recovery regions: the Eastern Washington region; the North Cascades region; and the Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast region. The recovery objectives to allow the wolf to be removed from the state's endangered species list are based on target numbers and species distribution. Specifically the gray wolf will be considered for state delisting if DFW documents the following:

- 15 successful breeding pairs for three consecutive years, distributed so that each recovery zone is host to at least four breeding pairs; or
- 18 successful breeding pairs, distributed so that each recovery zone is host to at least four breeding pairs.

Summary of Bill: The Commission may not designate or maintain a designation for the gray wolf as endangered, threatened, or sensitive under state law in any area of the state where the species was federally delisted prior to June 30, 2014. The Commission must immediately amend any rules necessary to conform to this change.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.