

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2771

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to wolf management using translocation.

Brief Description: Managing wolves using translocation.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Maycumber, Taylor, Buys and Shea.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/31/18, 2/1/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to immediately initiate and expedite wolf translocation as a management tool.
- Requires the Department to provide a written report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature on progress made towards the implementation of translocation by December 31, 2020.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Chapman, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Fitzgibbon, Kretz, Lytton, Pettigrew, Robinson, Schmick, Springer and Stanford.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Orcutt and Walsh.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Blake, Chair.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

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.

Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.

Federal law lists the gray wolf as an endangered species for the portion of the state located west of Highways 97, 17, and 395 that run through Central Washington. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) has authority to classify endangered and threatened species in Washington by rule, and has classified the gray wolf as an endangered species in the entirety of the state. The Commission adopted the Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Conservation and Management Plan) in December of 2011, which identifies target population objectives, management tools, reclassification criteria, an implementation plan, and a species monitoring plan.

The conservation and management plan identifies three wolf recovery regions: (1) the Eastern Washington region; (2) the North Cascades region; and (3) 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 the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) documents the following:

- 15 successful breeding pairs for three consecutive years, distributed so that each recovery region contains at least four breeding pairs; or
- 18 successful breeding pairs, distributed so that each recovery region contains at least four breeding pairs.

Translocation as a Management Tool.

Translocation is a management tool described in the conservation and management plan that the Department may consider to move wolves from one region to another region not receiving wolves through natural dispersal. Evaluation of translocation could begin when one recovery region exceeds its delisting requirements by at least one breeding pair while another recovery region remains unoccupied. Under the conservation and management plan, consideration of translocation would require a series of steps including:

- a feasibility assessment to establish whether sufficient suitable habitat and prey are available at a potential translocation site in the recipient region, and to ensure removal of wolves would not cause the wolf population to fall below management objectives in the source region;
- an implementation plan, depending on the results of the feasibility assessment, with a detailed description of translocation methods, selection of release sites, and consideration of genetics in selecting the source population; and
- a public review process under either the National Environmental Policy Act or the State Environmental Policy Act. The type of review would depend on a number of factors, including the jurisdiction of the land to which a wolf would be translocated.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department must immediately initiate and expedite translocation of wolves in regions where multiple packs range to areas with fewer wolves, and must use best available science to determine potential translocation sites. Once translocation is initiated, it must be

expedited by all state agencies involved in the action. The Department may not translocate wolves known to depredate livestock or that have shown signs of being habituated to livestock or the presence of humans. A report to the Legislature is due from the Department by December 31, 2020, on the progress made to use translocation as a wolf management tool.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes the requirement that the translocation process not exceed a three-year period, provides that translocation must be used to relocate wolves from regions containing multiple packs to regions with fewer wolves, requires the Department to use the best available science to determine potential recipient sites, and specifies that, once initiated, all state agencies involved must expedite the process. Additionally, the substitute bill adds the DFW report to the Legislature on the progress of translocation, and specifies that the Department may not translocate wolves known to depredate livestock, or have become habituated to livestock or human presence.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on January 26, 2018.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is another attempt to manage the growing wolf population. Wolves are not dispersing fast enough. There is not time to wait for the plan to unfold. There are problems arising with wolves that could not be anticipated. About 80 to 90 percent of the wolves in Washington are concentrated in northeast Washington and the population of wolves continues to grow. Unusually large amounts of cattle are being lost to wolves in the area. There was a bill last year to delist the wolf in four counties where wolves are most prevalent, but the word delisting is troublesome to some people. Translocation could be more controversial, but it is discussed as a management tool under the current management plan. There has been work done over the summer with various groups, including conservation groups, to address the problem. The impacts of wolf depredation on livestock make it difficult to maintain a sustainable ranch. The existence of undocumented packs and un-collared wolves makes it difficult for ranchers to take steps to avoid livestock predation.

There are organizations that can help work with the federal government to coordinate translocation. The bill should clarify that review under the State Environmental Policy Act must be completed before wolves are translocated, and should clarify that no problem wolves or packs may be translocated. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) could be strategic about where wolves are moved. There should be an effort to develop a post delisting plan.

(Opposed) Studies suggest that translocation results in a high wolf mortality rate. Since the population is still small, the state cannot afford significant losses. Depredations on wolves by human predators is seldom reported. There have been several poaching incidents. Lenient penalties on poachers show that there is little risk to the crime. The crime of poaching should be upgraded. The state must offer a reward for catching poachers.

(Other) The Department appreciates the intent of the bill, but has concerns. Translocation is a commonly used tool, and it is discussed in the conservation and management plan. The state is seeing annual growth of about 30 percent in the wolf population. There is not a need to speed up the process. Translocation would likely require review under either the State or National Environmental Policy Acts, an Environmental Impact Statement, and coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). As the wolf is listed as endangered in western two-thirds of the state, management of the species is under USFWS jurisdiction. The federal government does not have options for relocation or lethal removal of wolves. Some wolves will disperse away from a new area.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; and Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau and Washington Cattlemen's Association.

(Opposed) David Linn.

(Other) Donny Martorello, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.