

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2906

As Reported by House Committee On:
Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the use of radio collars on gray wolves by the department of fish and wildlife.

Brief Description: Concerning the use of radio collars on gray wolves by the department of fish and wildlife.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Lekanoff, Walsh, Schmick, Blake, Dent, Chandler, Orcutt, Springer, Pettigrew and Shewmake.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources: 2/4/20, 2/7/20 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), until gray wolves are no longer classified as threatened, endangered, or sensitive under state law, to prioritize the use of radio collars to monitor gray wolves and avoid conflicts with livestock.
- Requires the WDFW to make multiple attempts each year to collar one or more wolves within packs with known livestock depredations within the previous three years, as well as other packs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chapman, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Kretz, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Ramos, Schmick, Springer and Walsh.

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.

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 species as endangered, threatened, or sensitive 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 defines a "pack" as: "a group of wolves, usually consisting of a male, a female, and their offspring from one or more generations." For purposes of monitoring, a pack is defined as "a group of two or more wolves traveling together in winter."

The Department of Fish and Wildlife publishes a wolf conservation and management report in the spring of each year. According to the most recent report, published April 5, 2019, there were 27 confirmed packs in the state as of December 31, 2018.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must prioritize the use of radio collars to monitor wolves in Washington, until wolves are no longer classified as threatened, endangered, or sensitive under state law. The WDFW must make multiple attempts each year to collar one or more wolves in packs with known depredations at any point in the previous three years, as well as other packs.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill adds that the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must prioritize the use of radio collars to monitor wolves until wolves are no longer classified as threatened, endangered, or sensitive under state law. The requirement that the WDFW collar at least two wolves in each pack in conflict is removed and replaced with a provision requiring the WDFW to make multiple attempts to collar one or more wolves in packs with known depredations at any point in the previous three years, as well as other packs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 7, 2020.

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 bill represents another effort to deal with the wolf issue. The state needs to do all it can to avoid wolf conflicts with livestock. Monitoring wolves by equipping them

with radio collars is not a solution, but it is a tool that can help. Ranchers and range riders have been making efforts to operate in ways that reduce or avoid conflicts. In the past, conflict specialists have been able to help ranchers know where wolves are. They could also notify ranchers when no wolves were present, allowing ranchers to focus on other tasks. There was frustration over the summer with chronic depredations and a lack of response from the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Monitoring wolves should be a department-wide priority for the WDFW rather than a priority for just a few people. The Cattlemen's Association sees this as a reasonable approach.

(Opposed) Currently, there is not a fiscal note on the bill, but the use of more collars is an expense that the WDFW cannot afford and detracts from other conservation efforts. The WDFW has been unable to break the cycle of conflict, and more collars will not be effective. The Governor recently worked with the Director of the WDFW to direct the WDFW to reduce lethal wolf removal. Recently, it was discovered that some WDFW range riders were not patrolling when they should have been. The WDFW should ensure that employees are using resources wisely.

(Other) The WDFW is supportive of the concept and intent brought forward by the prime sponsor. The bill as currently drafted sets the WDFW up for failure and sets stakeholders up for more frustration. Capturing and collaring wolves is a difficult task, and there is no guarantee of success. Wolves learn to avoid certain tools. Sometimes the best thing to do is to wait for an opportunity to collar. If there is a requirement for two wolves to be collared in each pack in conflict, it could serve as incentive for the WDFW to avoid removing a collared wolf and taking the WDFW out of compliance with the requirement in the bill.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; and Mark Streuli, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

(Opposed) David Linn.

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

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.