

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2097

As of March 29, 2019

Title: An act relating to addressing statewide wolf recovery.

Brief Description: Addressing statewide wolf recovery.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Springer, Blake, Pettigrew, Dent, Schmick, Dye, Maycumber, Wilcox and Corry).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/11/19, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 4/02/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to review the population status of the gray wolf, by February 29, 2020.
- Directs the Fish and Wildlife Commission to consider whether a change in listing status is warranted, by August 31, 2020.
- Directs DFW to develop and implement conflict mitigation guidelines for each wolf recovery region.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: Gray Wolf Management. 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 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 statewide. By rule, a wildlife species may be delisted when, based on the preponderance of scientific data available, its populations either:

- are no longer in danger of failing or declining, or are no longer vulnerable; or
- meet target population objectives set out in a DFW-developed and commission-adopted recovery plan.

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.

The commission adopted the Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (plan) in December of 2011, which identifies target population objectives, management tools, reclassification criteria, an implementation plan, and a species monitoring plan. The 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 identified in the plan to allow the gray wolf to be removed from the state's endangered species list are based on target numbers and species distribution.

Under the plan, the gray wolf will be considered for state delisting if the DFW 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.

Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant. The Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant (grant) was created in 2017 and is administered by the Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Grant funds must be used for nonlethal deterrence resources, including human presence, equipment, and tools, in Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, or Pend Oreille counties. Grant funds may only be distributed to nonprofit organizations that have board members, or individuals who are willing to receive assistance from relevant government agencies.

An advisory board advises WSDA on the use of grant funds and the use of resources funded by the grants. The Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant Advisory Board (advisory board) consists of one member each from the Okanogan County, Ferry County, Stevens County, and Pend Oreille County conservation district boards. The director of WSDA appoints advisory board members to two-year terms in consultation with the relevant conservation district and legislators. Advisory board members must be knowledgeable about wolf depredation and nonlethal wolf management, and may not benefit financially from grant-funded contracts.

Summary of Bill: DFW must conduct a review of the listing status of the gray wolf to determine if the state's wolf population is no longer in danger of failing or declining, or no longer vulnerable to limited numbers, disease, predation, habitat loss or change, or exploitation. DFW must also examine the relationship between wolf recovery in the Eastern Washington region and its role in wolf colonization in the rest of the state. This review must be completed by February 29, 2020.

Based on the review, the commission must determine whether a change in listing status is warranted. The commission's consideration of the gray wolf listing status must be completed by August 31, 2020.

DFW is directed to maintain sufficient staff resources in Ferry and Stevens counties for ongoing response to conflicts between gray wolves and livestock, and for continued implementation of proactive nonlethal deterrents.

During the time when wolves are classified by the commission as an endangered or protected species, DFW must develop and implement conflict mitigation guidelines for each wolf recovery region considering the provisions of the 2011 plan. Conflict mitigation guidelines must distinguish between the wolf recovery regions defined in the 2011 plan at or above the regional recovery objective, and regions below the regional recovery objective.

Conservation district staff, as well as board members, are eligible for appointment to the grant advisory board. The provision allowing individuals willing to receive technical assistance from DFW or the United States Forest Service are eligible to receive grant funds is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on March 12, 2019.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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