
**Agriculture and Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 2423

Brief Description: Concerning gray wolf management.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Springer, Schmick and Dent.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife to convene a workgroup to develop a regional management plan for gray wolves in the portion of Eastern Washington where gray wolves are not federally listed as threatened or endangered.

Hearing Date: 1/26/24

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

Both the state and federal government maintain designations for the gray wolf in Washington as endangered or protected. 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 State 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. A wildlife species may be removed from state listing when, based on the preponderance of scientific data available, its populations either: are no longer in danger of failing, declining, or are vulnerable due to certain factors including limited numbers, disease, predation, exploitation, or habitat loss or change; or meet target population objectives set out in a Department of Fish and Wildlife (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 part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Commission adopted the Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Conservation and Management Plan) in December 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: the Eastern Washington region; the North Cascades region; and the Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast region. The recovery objectives identified in the Conservation and Management Plan to allow the gray wolf to be removed from the state's endangered species list are based on target numbers and species distribution.

Summary of Bill:

The DFW must convene a work group to develop a regional plan for gray wolf management in the portion of Eastern Washington where the gray wolf is not designated by the federal government as threatened or endangered as of January 1, 2024.

The work group must include representatives of county cattlemen organizations, county governments, a conservation nonprofit, and a regional nonprofit organization that operates range riding and other year-round wolf and livestock conflict avoidance tactics in Northeast Washington. The DFW must invite affected tribes to participate and give affected tribes the opportunity to review drafts of the plan before it is completed.

At a minimum, the management plan must address:

- increased cooperation with input from county governments, cattlemen associations, and local organizations providing range riding and other conflict deterrence efforts with respect to the methods and approaches to minimizing impacts to livestock production;
- minimizing livestock loss and economically costly stress on livestock and minimizing the need for lethal control of wolves;
- improved responsiveness from the department on planning proactive deterrence for ranchers;
- faster response time from the department when lethal control is required;
- habitat improvement for ungulate populations;
- an improved livestock loss and damage compensation program; and
- maintaining recovery objectives and an overall stable wolf population in the region.

The DFW must provide progress reports to the Legislature on regional plan development by December 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025. The DFW shall complete and implement the regional plan by December 31, 2025. If the work group does not reach agreement on the regional plan within six months, a minority report must be included.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2024.

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

passed.