

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5171

As of February 26, 2025

Title: An act relating to claims for livestock damage due to wolf predation.

Brief Description: Concerning livestock damage due to wolf predation.

Sponsors: Senators Short, Chapman, Dozier, Schoesler, Wagoner and Warnick.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/20/25, 2/13/25 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/26/25.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Defines indirect damage claim and requires that such claims be calculated by comparing current year losses to the average annual losses during the year that the claimant experienced his or her first confirmed wolf depredation and the two years preceding that event.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5171 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Chapman, Chair; Krishnadasan, Vice Chair; Short, Ranking Member; Lias, Muzzall, Saldaña, Schoesler, Shewmake and Wagoner.

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Jed Herman (786-7346)

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.

Background: State law authorizes payments to the owners of livestock that have been killed or injured by certain large predators, including wolves. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) also issues payments for indirect livestock losses, such as reduced weight gains, as a result of harassment by wolves.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission is statutorily authorized to adopt criteria for the type of damage qualifying for compensation. Pursuant to this authority, the WDFW requires that claims for higher than normal livestock losses, reduced weight gains, or reduced pregnancy rates due to harassment of livestock by wolves include:

- three consecutive years of records preceding the year of the claim. Claims are assessed for losses in excess of the preceding three-year running average;
- the losses occurring on large pastures or range land where regular monitoring of livestock is impractical;
- verification by WDFW that wolves are occupying the area;
- losses which cannot reasonably be explained by other causes; and
- compliance by the claimant with WDFW's preventative measures checklist, or have a damage prevention cooperative agreement or a waiver.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): To calculate the amount of an indirect damage claim, the WDFW must compare current year losses to the average annual losses during the year that the claimant experienced his or her first confirmed wolf depredation and the two years preceding that event. An indirect damage claim is defined as a damage claim for livestock losses, reduced weight gains, or reduced pregnancy rates due to harassment of livestock by wolves.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Directs WDFW to determine indirect damage claims by comparing current year losses to the average annual losses during the year that the claimant experienced his or her first confirmed wolf depredation and the two years preceding that event, rather than the annual average loss a claimant was experiencing before the reestablishment of wolf populations in Washington.
- Removes language that creates an indirect damage claim when the cause of death is indeterminate but the loss or injury occurred in an area occupied by wolves.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Agriculture & Natural Resources): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This bill would fill an immediate need to help producers. The three-year average really doesn't show the impact of indirect losses as wolves have recolonized the state and wolf presence exerts a significant financial and mental toll on producers.

Indirect claims are a complicated program with a lot of paperwork and needs some revision. Ranchers have good records and it is obvious that indirect claims increase significantly when wolves come into an area. There is a great need for this type of funding. Not everyone will use it, but it is critical for those who need it.

There is significant collaboration on this issue and many ideas in the works. Producers want a full ecosystem and to live with wildlife.

CON: Many factors contribute to indirect losses, including weather, disease, and husbandry practices; the formula in this bill risks mistakenly attributing losses to wolves. Colorado uses a similar formula and last year received claims of \$580,000 from three ranchers.

OTHER: This is a real need, but the program must have clarity. Long-term records aren't always available. Including indeterminate losses that may be challenging to implement and very expensive. If claims increase, the agency may not be able to fund them; the funding the agency receives for these claims has been fully obligated for the last several years.

Persons Testifying (Agriculture & Natural Resources): PRO: Senator Shelly Short, Prime Sponsor; Samee Charriere; Paula Swedeen, Conservation Northwest.

CON: Francisco Santiago-Ávila, Washington Wildlife First.

OTHER: Mick Cope, WDFW.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Agriculture & Natural Resources):
No one.