
SENATE BILL 5354

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senators Short, Dozier, and Wagoner

Read first time 01/17/25. Referred to Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources.

1 AN ACT Relating to providing flexibility for the department of
2 fish and wildlife to collaborate with local governments to manage
3 gray wolves; amending RCW 77.12.020; adding a new section to chapter
4 36.01 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 77.36 RCW; and creating a
5 new section.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that
8 Washington's gray wolf population has steadily increased for 15
9 consecutive years, with the most recent annual wolf report indicating
10 a 20 percent population growth in 2023. As of the end of 2023, there
11 was a minimum of 260 wolves in 42 packs across the state,
12 demonstrating a sustained recovery of the species.

13 (2) The legislature finds that the United States fish and
14 wildlife service, after an extensive peer-reviewed assessment using
15 the best available science, announced in February 2024, a "not
16 warranted" finding for petitions to list gray wolves under the
17 endangered species act in the eastern third of Washington. This
18 determination highlights the species' strong recovery and resilience
19 in the region.

20 (3) The legislature finds that as gray wolves continue to
21 disperse across Washington, there is a need for an incremental,

1 localized approach to management. Regional differences in wolf
2 populations require tailored management strategies that address
3 specific ecological and community needs. An incremental, localized
4 policy aligns with the state's recovery goals while balancing the
5 ecological benefits of a thriving wolf population with the priorities
6 of rural communities. Rural communities seek to balance environmental
7 stewardship with other priorities, such as assuring a diversified
8 economy that includes ranching and the protection of the public,
9 livestock, and domestic household pets.

10 (4) Therefore, the legislature intends to provide localized
11 management of gray wolves in Washington, reflecting their sustained
12 population growth and the findings of federal and state wildlife
13 agencies. This policy will maintain protections for the species while
14 providing the necessary tools for effective and science-based
15 management, ensuring the continued recovery of gray wolves and
16 coexistence with human communities.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 36.01
18 RCW to read as follows:

19 (1) The department of fish and wildlife shall manage the gray
20 wolf as if it has been removed from state designation as endangered
21 under RCW 77.12.020 within any county where the gray wolf is not
22 designated under the federal endangered species act as threatened or
23 endangered in the county or portion of the county and the following
24 criteria are met:

25 (a) The state meets the recovery objective of 15 breeding pairs
26 in the state for at least three years; and

27 (b) There are at least three documented breeding pairs in the
28 county or portion of the county where the gray wolf is not designated
29 under the federal endangered species act as threatened or endangered.

30 (2) When the criteria identified in subsection (1) of this
31 section are met, the legislative body of the county must provide
32 notice to the fish and wildlife commission and to the director of the
33 department of fish and wildlife that the gray wolf no longer meets
34 the criteria for state designation as endangered under RCW 77.12.020
35 in that county.

36 (3) After a county acts under subsection (2) of this section, the
37 county must enter into an interlocal agreement with the department of
38 fish and wildlife and any tribes within the jurisdiction to
39 collaboratively comanage the gray wolf in accordance with a regional

1 plan developed pursuant to section 3 of this act, including
2 collaborating with local law enforcement to receive and investigate
3 reports of problem animals.

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 77.36
5 RCW to read as follows:

6 (1) Once a county acts under section 2(2) of this act, the
7 department shall form a work group to develop a regional plan for
8 gray wolf management in the county or portion of the county that
9 meets the criteria in section 2(2) of this act.

10 (2) Members of the work group must include representatives of
11 county cattlemen organizations, representatives of county
12 governments, a representative from a regional nonprofit organization
13 that operates range riding and other year-round wolf and livestock
14 conflict avoidance tactics in northeast Washington, and a
15 representative from a conservation nonprofit. The department shall
16 invite affected Indian tribes to participate and shall give affected
17 Indian tribes the opportunity to review drafts of the plan before it
18 is completed. The department is encouraged to invite representatives
19 of the United States forest service. The department shall hire an
20 outside third-party neutral facilitator to ensure effective
21 functioning of the work group.

22 (3) At a minimum, the plan must address the following objectives:

23 (a) Increased cooperation with input from county governments,
24 cattlemen associations, and local organizations providing range
25 riding and other conflict deterrence efforts with respect to the
26 methods and approaches to minimizing impacts to livestock production;

27 (b) Minimization of livestock loss and economically costly stress
28 on livestock and minimizing the need for lethal control of wolves;

29 (c) Improved responsiveness from the department on planning
30 proactive deterrence for ranchers;

31 (d) Faster response time from the department when lethal control
32 is required;

33 (e) Habitat improvement for ungulate populations;

34 (f) An improved livestock loss and damage compensation program;
35 and

36 (g) Maintaining recovery objectives and an overall stable wolf
37 population in the region.

38 (4) The department shall complete and implement the regional plan
39 within six months and may revise the plan periodically as conditions

1 change. If the work group does not reach agreement on the regional
2 plan within six months, a minority report must be included.

3 **Sec. 4.** RCW 77.12.020 and 2014 c 202 s 302 are each amended to
4 read as follows:

5 (1) The director shall investigate the habits and distribution of
6 the various species of wildlife native to or adaptable to the
7 habitats of the state. The commission shall determine whether a
8 species should be managed by the department and, if so, classify it
9 under this section.

10 (2) The commission may classify by rule wild animals as game
11 animals and game animals as fur-bearing animals.

12 (3) The commission may classify by rule wild birds as game birds
13 or predatory birds. All wild birds not otherwise classified are
14 protected wildlife.

15 (4) In addition to those species listed in RCW 77.08.020, the
16 commission may classify by rule as game fish other species of the
17 class that are commonly found in fresh water except those classified
18 as food fish by the director.

19 (5) The director may recommend to the commission that a species
20 of wildlife should not be hunted or fished. The commission may
21 designate species of wildlife as protected.

22 (6) If the director determines that a species of wildlife is
23 seriously threatened with extinction in the state of Washington, the
24 director may request its designation as an endangered species. The
25 commission may designate an endangered species.

26 (7) If the director determines that a species of the animal
27 kingdom, not native to Washington, is dangerous to the environment or
28 wildlife of the state, the director may request its designation as
29 deleterious exotic wildlife. The commission may designate deleterious
30 exotic wildlife.

31 (8) Upon recommendation by the director, the commission may
32 develop a work plan to eradicate native aquatic species that threaten
33 human health. Priority shall be given to water bodies that the
34 department of health has classified as representing a threat to human
35 health based on the presence of a native aquatic species.

36 (9) When the commission and director receive notice as described
37 in section 2 of this act, the director must: Evaluate and determine
38 whether the county has attained the criteria; and initiate
39 development of a management plan pursuant to section 3 of this act

1 for gray wolves within that county or portion of county where the
2 criteria have been met pursuant to section 3 of this act. Within six
3 months of the receipt of notice, the director must notify the
4 commission that a management plan developed consistent with section 3
5 of this act has been completed and will be implemented.

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