



WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

NEWS RELEASE

600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091

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Contact: Commission Office, (360) 902-2267
WDFW Public Affairs, (360) 902-2259

Fish and Wildlife Commission adopts plan to conserve and manage gray wolves

OLYMPIA - After four years of development and extensive public review, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission today unanimously adopted a plan that will guide state conservation and management of gray wolves in Washington state.

The citizen commission, which sets policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), approved the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan at a public meeting in Olympia.

Key provisions of the plan establish recovery objectives for gray wolves in three regions in Washington, along with procedures for addressing predation on livestock and impacts on ungulates such as deer, elk and caribou.

Prior to the final vote, the commission approved several changes to the draft plan, including one that modified the distribution of breeding wolf pairs needed to remove wolves from the state's endangered species list.

Once abundant in the Pacific Northwest, gray wolves are currently classified by the state as endangered throughout Washington. They are also listed under federal law as endangered in the western two-thirds of the state.

WDFW began developing the wolf-management plan in 2007, anticipating that gray wolves would naturally migrate into the state from Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and British Columbia. Since then, five wolf packs have been documented in the state - three in northeastern Washington and two in the Cascade Mountains.

During the past four years, the plan developed by WDFW in conjunction with a 17-member citizen Wolf Working Group has been the focus of 23 public meetings, 65,000 written comments and a blind scientific peer review.

"This plan establishes recovery goals for wolves, while also giving wildlife managers and individuals the tools they need to protect livestock and wildlife populations," said Miranda Wecker, commission chair. "The goal is that wolves will no longer need special status in our state and can be managed as part of the overall ecosystem."

Key elements of the plan approved by the commission include:

- **Recovery goals:** The plan establishes a recovery objective of 15 breeding pairs of wolves that are present in the state for at least three years. Before gray wolves can be removed from the state's endangered species list, at least four of those breeding pairs must be verified in Eastern Washington, four in the northern Cascades, four in the southern Cascades/Northwest coastal area and three others anywhere in the state. The plan approved by the commission also allows WDFW to initiate action to delist gray wolves if 18 breeding pairs are documented during a single year.
- **Livestock protection:** The plan provides a variety of management measures - from technical

assistance for landowners to lethal removal - to control wolves that prey on livestock. The plan also establishes conditions for compensating ranchers who lose livestock to wolf predation.

- **Wildlife protection:** The plan allows WDFW to use lethal and non-lethal measures to manage wolf predation on at-risk deer, elk and caribou populations if wolf numbers reach or exceed the recovery objective within a region where predation occurs. The commission modified the definition of "at-risk" populations to give WDFW more flexibility in responding to the effects of wolf predation on those animals.

WDFW is not allowed to import wolves from other states or seek to increase the wolf population to historic levels under the parameters set for the new wolf management plan by an associated environmental impact statement.

All aspects of the state's plan will take immediate effect east of state highways 97, 17 and 395, where gray wolves were removed from federal protection last May. In the rest of the state, federal law will take precedence over the state plan until wolves are delisted under the federal Endangered Species Act in that area.

The draft Wolf Conservation and Management Plan is posted on WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/gray_wolf/. The final plan, incorporating amendments adopted by the commission, will be posted on the site by mid-January.

In a separate action, the commission approved proposals by WDFW to acquire land in Mason, Wahkiakum, Grant and Asotin counties to preserve critical habitat for fish and wildlife. The commission also approved a timber-thinning project proposed by WDFW on the Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin wildlife areas.

In addition, WDFW staff briefed the commission on new sportfishing rules proposed for the 2012-13 season, including changes that would declassify northern pike as a gamefish and move the opening day of the lowland lake fishing season to the fourth Saturday in April.

WDFW is accepting public comments through Dec. 30 on those sportfishing proposals, which are posted at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/rule_proposals/ on the department's website. The commission will hear public comments on those proposals at a meeting set for Jan. 6-7 in Olympia and is scheduled to vote on those proposals during a public meeting Feb. 3-4.

Additional information about the commission and upcoming meetings is available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/commission/>.