



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

May 15, 2018

The Honorable Dan Newhouse
United States House of Representatives
1318 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Newhouse:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) appreciates your continued assistance to encourage the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to complete the delisting of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and remove it from federal protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As you may know, gray wolves in the western two-thirds of Washington State are currently classified as “endangered” and are under federal management.

The USFWS published the original delisting proposal on June 13, 2013, and then on March 27, 2014, the USFWS closed the second round of public comments. The Department submitted letters of support for delisting in December 2013 and March 2014. To date, the USFWS has not released a decision notice on the federal status of gray wolves and we remain concerned with the lack of progress towards federal delisting.

Washington has a strong Wolf Conservation and Management Plan that has received broad support, and we are committed to maintaining a viable wolf population in Washington. As demonstrated with the current rate of recovery, the Department is well suited to facilitate the recovery and management of wolves across the state.

- **Protection under Washington State Laws** – The Department has state-specific authority (RCW 77.12.020 and 77.15.120) to designate and protect species at risk of extinction and has classified wolves as endangered since 1980, an action akin to federal protection granted under ESA. Wolves will remain protected until their population reaches the levels established in the state recovery plan.
- **The Department is equipped for wolf conservation and management** - Since 2013, the Washington State Legislature has provided approximately \$1.5 million per biennium for wolf management from a permanent increase in the cost of personalized license plates. The Department uses that funding, in addition with other sources, to support 23 positions deployed across the state that address wolf conflict as well as other wildlife conflict issues.

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- **Wolves are recovering in Washington State** - In 2008, the first wolf pack was documented in Washington State. Today we have 22 known packs. During this time, the state's wolf population has increased by an average of more than 30 percent per year. We want to have consistent management of wolves across the state of Washington. For us, successful wolf recovery means that we have a sustainable wolf population distributed throughout the state, the public accepts the presence of wolves on the landscape, and Washington citizens are confident in the Department's wolf management.

The Washington wolf management plan establishes strong expectations that livestock operators will use preventive strategies to avoid wolf-livestock conflict. But sometimes we may need to remove wolves that become habituated to livestock as a food source. Under the current federal designation and management, we cannot fully implement our plan in the western two-thirds of the state and the only means available for the USFWS to address wolf-livestock conflicts in the geographic area under the federal endangered designation is for the USFWS to attempt to relocate livestock-killing wolves.

To ensure ongoing success in wolf recovery, the federal listing needs to keep pace with the on-the-ground recovery status and allow the state to fully implement its management plan. Therefore, I support your efforts to advance the delisting of wolves and return management to the state.

Thank you for considering this request. The Department is available to assist you with any information you may need. Please contact Meagan West (360) 902-2235 for more information.

Sincerely,



Joe Stohr
Director

cc: Robyn Thorson, USFWS
Eric Rickerson, USFWS