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Conservationists deal blow to Wildlife Services in landmark WA wolf case ***Court rejects indiscriminate wolf killing***

OLYMPIA, Wash. – In response to a challenge brought by a coalition of conservation organizations, a federal court rejected plans to escalate cruel wolf killing in Washington state by the secretive federal program dubbed "Wildlife Services." Federal District Judge Robert Bryan held that Wildlife Services should have prepared a more in-depth environmental analysis of the impacts of its proposed wolf killing activities, finding the program's cursory environmental assessment faulty because the proposed actions would have significant cumulative impacts that are highly controversial and highly uncertain.

Wildlife Services is a controversial program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service responsible for killing millions of wild animals every year, including wolves, grizzly bears, otters, foxes, coyotes and birds, with almost no oversight or accountability.

Judge Bryan vacated the program's analysis, stating "Wildlife Services shall not take any further wolf management actions in Washington under the proposed action alternative, but shall observe the status quo in place prior to the environmental assessment and [finding of no significant impact]."

"Wildlife Services has long asserted that it need not comply with our nations' federal environmental laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, but this decision rejects those arguments and requires Wildlife Services to comply with all federal laws, not just those it finds convenient to comply with," said Western Environmental Law Center Attorney John Mellgren.

A 2013 internal audit revealed that Wildlife Services' accounting practices lacked transparency and violated state and federal laws. The program employs incredibly cruel tools to kill wildlife including aerial gunning, leghold traps, snares and poisons.

"It is long past time that we base wildlife management decisions on the best available science, not on antiquated anti-wolf rhetoric and myth," said Bethany Cotton, wildlife program director for WildEarth Guardians.

"Wildlife Services needs to come out of the shadows, update its analyses and adopt practices in keeping with modern science and values about the ethical treatment of animals."

The environmental assessment prepared by Wildlife Services failed to provide data to support several of its core assertions. For example, Wildlife Services claimed that killing wolves reduced wolf-caused losses of livestock, yet recent [peer-reviewed research](#) from Washington State University directly contradicts this conclusion, finding that killing wolves actually leads to an increase in wolf-livestock conflicts. The environmental assessment also fails to address the ecological effects of killing wolves in Washington, including impacts on wolf populations in neighboring states and on non-target animals, including federally protected grizzly bears and Canada lynx.

"This decision is so incredibly encouraging," said Nick Cady, legal director of Cascadia Wildlands. "We have been working for over a decade to hold Wildlife Services accountable for its blind, reckless lethal control

programs. This decision paves the way for meaningful analysis of the program's impacts and hopefully a meaningful look at whether or not this wolf killing is worth it."

Washington has experienced Wildlife Services' wolf killing program firsthand. In August 2014, Wildlife Services snipers shot and killed the Huckleberry wolf pack's alpha female during a helicopter gunning operation. The death of the Huckleberry pack's breeding female threatens the future of the entire pack.

Wildlife Services also "advised" the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in the contentious 2012 killing of Washington's Wedge wolf pack. In that instance, WDFW killed seven wolves after predation of livestock on public lands, despite the rancher's failure to take sufficient action to protect his cattle.

"The Court made a wise and prudent decision that safeguards the legal right of citizens to know what their government is doing in their name," said Timothy Coleman, executive director of Kettle Range Conservation Group. "The so-called Wildlife Services cannot just grant itself authority to execute an endangered species absent the public interest or best available science."

Wolves were driven to extinction in Washington in the early 1900s by a government-sponsored eradication program on behalf of the livestock industry. The species began to return to Washington from neighboring Idaho and British Columbia in the early 2000s and the wolf population in the state has grown to 13 confirmed packs. Despite this growth, wolves in the state are far from recovered and face ongoing threats. According to WDFW, Washington currently has at least 68 wolves in 16 packs.

The organizations, Cascadia Wildlands, WildEarth Guardians, Kettle Range Conservation Group, Predator Defense and the Lands Council were represented by the Western Environmental Law Center.

A copy of the decision is available [here](#).

A copy of the original complaint is available [here](#).

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