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## **Washington Wildlife Agency Urged to End Support for Abolishing Federal Wolf Protections**

OLYMPIA, *Wash.*— Eleven conservation organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Washington residents sent a [letter](#) to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife today urging the agency to rescind its support for stripping wolves of federal Endangered Species Act protections. The department has repeatedly expressed support for dropping the federal safeguards, most recently in a [letter](#) sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Dec. 13, 2013. The delisting runs counter to the best available science and ignores the values of the vast majority of Washington residents who want to see federal wolf protections maintained.

“Most people in Washington want wolves protected. The state department’s perplexing stance is out of step with the science and the values of local residents,” said Amaroq Weiss, West Coast wolf organizer at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Wolves are just beginning to recover in Washington and face continued persecution. Federal protection is clearly needed to keep recovery on track.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in June 2013 proposed to remove federal endangered species protections for gray wolves across most of the lower 48 states, including in the western two-thirds of Washington. The science underlying the proposal has been sharply criticized by many scientists, including a peer review panel contracted by the federal agency, which unanimously [concluded](#) the proposal was not based on the best available science.

“The department should have never endorsed the delisting given the extremely controversial and political nature of this issue,” said Nick Cady of Cascadia Wildlands. “The department should instead be focused on ironing out significant shortcomings within its own wolf program, in order to prevent future regretful decisions, like the extermination of the Wedge pack.”

Washington’s wolf population has grown from zero wolves in 2007 to roughly 51 wolves in 10 packs at the start of 2013, with new numbers to be announced this week. The recovery has largely been driven by federal Endangered Species Act protections, which led to the reintroduction of wolves in adjacent Idaho and made it against the law to kill wolves. Wolf recovery in Washington was almost upended when several members of

the state's first pack, known as the Lookout pack, were poached. In 2011 the poachers were caught and prosecuted under federal law and the pack has started to make a comeback. In 2012 the Wedge pack was killed in a department lethal control action over wolf-livestock conflicts on public land. The mass killing resulted in public outrage that the department had acted in violation of the state wolf plan and that the rancher involved had refused to adequately protect his cattle. In February, a wolf was found illegally shot and killed in Stevens County.

"The scientific peer review panel was unified in rejecting the federal government's scientific basis for proposing the national delisting of gray wolves," said Suzanne Stone with Defenders of Wildlife. "Washington state should withdraw its support of the Service's delisting proposal and instead advocate that the Service follow the best available science, as required by law, to chart a sustainable recovery path for wolves in Washington and throughout the U.S."

The Department's support for dropping federal protections for wolves runs contrary to the sentiments of Washington residents, nearly three-quarters of whom oppose delisting, according to a [September 2013 poll](#). That matches the strong support nationwide for continued federal wolf protections demonstrated in a [national poll conducted in July 2013](#).

"The protection of wolves as part of our Washington state wildlife is a public trust issue," said Rebecca Wolfe of the Washington State Chapter of the Sierra Club. "It is the duty of the department to care for the wildlife entrusted to them by the people."

"It's time for the department to lead, governed by science, not pandering to special interests, mythology, science fiction or their desire to sell hunting licenses," said Timothy Coleman, executive director of Kettle Range Conservation Group. "Gray wolf reintroduction to Yellowstone National Park showed the species is essential to ecosystem health. Washington citizens strongly support gray wolf recovery and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife should do all it can to make that happen."

The letter to the department was filed by groups representing hundreds of thousands of Washington residents, including the Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands, The Humane Society of the United States, Western Environmental Law Center, Defenders of Wildlife, Washington State Chapter of the Sierra Club, Wolf Haven International, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, Kettle Range Conservation Group, The Lands Council and Wildlands Network.

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