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State Fish and Wildlife Commission Denies Petition to Require Nonlethal Steps to Manage Washington Wolves

Eight Petitioning Groups Will Appeal to Governor

OLYMPIA, Wash.— The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission today denied a [petition](#) filed by eight conservation groups seeking to limit when wolves can be killed in response to livestock depredations, and to require livestock producers to exhaust nonlethal measures to prevent depredations before lethal action can be taken. The petition was filed to prevent lethal actions such as the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's 2012 decision to kill seven wolves in the Wedge Pack despite the fact that the livestock producer who had lost livestock had taken little action to protect his stock. Petitioners plan to appeal the commission's decision to the governor.

"Washington needs to make legally enforceable commitments to ensure the state's vulnerable, fledgling wolf population is treated like the endangered species that it is," said Amaroq Weiss, West Coast wolf organizer with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The state has made some headway, but without clear rules to prevent the department from pulling the trigger too quickly, Washington's wolves will be at great risk."

Conservation groups filed a similar petition in the summer of 2013 but withdrew it based on promises from the department to negotiate new rules governing lethal methods of wolf management. A year later, with no negotiations having taken place, the department gave notice to the commission it was going to introduce its own, far-less-protective lethal wolf-control rule, leading the groups to refile their petition.

"The conservation community has asked the department to engage an outside, unbiased, professional mediator so that stakeholders can negotiate rules language to address wolf-livestock conflict prevention and produce standards for the department to adhere to before resorting to lethal control of wolves," said Nick Cady, legal director for Cascadia Wildlands. "Until that mediated negotiation has taken place, we will continue to send a message to the state that Washington residents want their wolves protected."

In 2011 the Commission formally adopted a state [wolf plan](#), which was crafted in a five-year process with input from a 17-member stakeholder group, more than 65,000 written comments from the public, and a peer review by 43 scientists and wolf managers. However, commission and department officials have publicly stated that they view the plan as merely advisory. Its lack of legal enforceability resulted in the department's mishandling of the Wedge pack in 2012 and in the adoption of rules by the commission in 2013 that allow wolves to be killed under circumstances the wolf plan does not permit.

"It's time to put a stake in the ground and stop the state's backsliding on the wolf plan," said Tim Coleman, executive director for The Kettle Range Conservation Group. "We can all see what happens when nonlethal conflict prevention methods are used — they work."

Washington's wolves were driven to extinction in the early 1900s by a government-sponsored eradication program on behalf of the livestock industry. Since the early 2000s, the animals have started to make a comeback by dispersing into Washington from neighboring Idaho and British

Columbia. But wolf recovery is still in its infancy. According to the department's annual wolf report, Washington's wolf population grew by only one wolf, from a population of 51 wolves to 52 wolves from the end of 2012 to the end of 2013. In the past year, three wolves were killed by mountain lions, one wolf was illegally poached, and another was killed by a deer hunter. In the face of these threats, it is essential that more wolves are not lost from the state's tiny wolf population because of state-sanctioned lethal control actions that ignore the proven, nonlethal methods of conflict prevention.

"Wolf-livestock conflicts are so rare and, what's more — they are preventable," said Rebecca Wolfe, Wolf Advisory Group member for the Washington Chapter of the Sierra Club. "Let's get some rules in place to reflect that reality and also to recognize that lethal control of an endangered species should be an absolutely last resort."

The petition to ensure protections for wolves was filed by groups representing tens of thousands of Washington residents, including the Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands, Western Environmental Law Center, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, The Lands Council, Wildlands Network, Kettle Range Conservation Group and the Washington State Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Petitioners have 30 days from receipt of an official commission document denying the petition to file their appeal with Governor Inslee. Upon receipt of the appeal, the governor's office has 45 days to respond with a final decision.

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