
**Rural Development, Agriculture, &
Natural Resources Committee**

HB 2097

Brief Description: Addressing statewide wolf recovery.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Springer, Blake, Pettigrew, Dent, Schmick, Dye, Maycumber, Wilcox and Corry.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to immediately review the population status of the gray wolf.
- Requires the Fish and Wildlife Commission to consider, depending on the results of the Department's status review, whether a change in statewide or regional listing status is warranted.
- Requires the Department to increase staff in Ferry and Stevens counties for ongoing wolf-livestock conflict management, and for other nonlethal wolf management efforts.
- Provides that certain conservation district staff members are eligible for appointment to the Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant (Grant) advisory board.
- Removes the provision stating that certain individuals are no longer eligible for Grant funds.

Hearing Date: 2/22/19

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

Gray Wolf Management.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Federal law lists the gray wolf as an endangered species for the portion of the state located west of Highways 97, 17, and 395 that run through Central Washington. The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) has authority to classify endangered and threatened species in Washington by rule, and has classified the gray wolf as an endangered species statewide. By rule, a wildlife species may be delisted when, based on the preponderance of scientific data available, its populations either:

- are no longer in danger of failing, declining, or are vulnerable, due to factors including but not restricted to: limited numbers; disease; predation; exploitation; or habitat loss or change; or
- meet target population objectives set out in a Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department)-developed and Commission-adopted recovery plan.

The Commission adopted the Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Conservation and Management Plan) in December of 2011, which identifies target population objectives, management tools, reclassification criteria, an implementation plan, and a species monitoring plan.

The Conservation and Management Plan identifies three wolf recovery regions: (1) the Eastern Washington region; (2) the North Cascades region; and (3) the Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast region. The recovery objectives identified in the Conservation and Management Plan to allow the gray wolf to be removed from the state's endangered species list are based on target numbers and species distribution.

Under the Conservation and Management Plan, the gray wolf will be considered for state delisting if the Department documents the following:

- Fifteen successful breeding pairs for three consecutive years, distributed so that each recovery region contains at least four breeding pairs; or
- Eighteen successful breeding pairs, distributed so that each recovery region contains at least four breeding pairs.

Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant.

The Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant (Grant) was created in 2017 and is administered by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Grant funds must be used for nonlethal deterrence resources, including human presence, equipment, and tools, in Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, or Pend Oreille counties. Grant funds may only be distributed to nonprofit organizations that have board members, or individuals who are willing to receive assistance from relevant government agencies.

An advisory advises the WSDA on the use of Grant funds and the use of resources funded by the Grants. The advisory board consists of one member each from the Okanogan County, Ferry County, Stevens County, and Pend Oreille County conservation district boards. The Director of the WSDA appoints advisory board members to two-year terms in consultation with the relevant conservation district and legislators. Advisory board members must be knowledgeable about wolf depredation and nonlethal wolf management, and may not benefit financially from Grant-funded contracts.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) must conduct a review of the listing status of the gray wolf to determine if the state's wolf population is no longer in danger of failing or declining, or no longer vulnerable to limited numbers, disease, predation, habitat loss or change, or exploitation. The Department must also examine the relationship between wolf recovery in the Eastern Washington region and its role in wolf colonization in the rest of the state.

Based on the review, the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) must determine whether a change in listing status is warranted either statewide, or in the Eastern Washington region where the gray wolf has been removed from federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. Any such Commission decision may not impede gray wolf recolonization and recovery in the rest of the state. The Commission consideration of the gray wolf listing status must be completed by June 30, 2020.

The Department is directed to increase staff resources in Ferry and Stevens counties for ongoing response to conflicts between gray wolves and livestock, and for continued implementation of proactive nonlethal deterrents.

Conservation district staff, as well as board members, are eligible for appointment to the Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Grant (Grant) Advisory Board. The provision allowing individuals willing to receive technical assistance from the Department or the United States Forest Service are eligible to receive Grant funds is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 16, 2019.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.