
**Agriculture and Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 1698

Brief Description: Providing flexibility for the department of fish and wildlife to collaborate with local governments to manage gray wolves.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Lekanoff, Dent, Maycumber, Springer, Morgan and Eslick.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a procedure for the Department of Fish and Wildlife to manage gray wolves as if the species has been removed from state designation as protected or endangered in counties when certain population criteria have been met.

Hearing Date: 2/8/23

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

Both the state and federal government maintain designations for the gray wolf in Washington as endangered or protected. 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 State 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. A wildlife species may be removed from state listing when, based on the preponderance of scientific data available, its populations either: (1) are no longer in danger of failing, declining, or are vulnerable due to certain factors including limited numbers, disease, predation, exploitation, or habitat loss or change; or (2) meet target population objectives set out

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

in a Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)-developed and Commission-adopted recovery plan.

The Commission adopted the Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Conservation and Management Plan) in December 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 WDFW documents 15 successful breeding pairs for three consecutive years, distributed so that each recovery region contains at least four breeding pairs; or 18 successful breeding pairs, distributed so that each recovery region contains at least four breeding pairs.

Summary of Bill:

When the recovery objective of 15 breeding pairs has been met statewide, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must manage gray wolves as if they have been removed from listing as a state protected or endangered species in any county or portion of a county where the gray wolf is not designated under the federal Endangered Species Act and there are at least three documented breeding pairs in the county or in the portion of the county.

Once the criteria have been met, the legislative body of the county must provide notice to both the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) and the Director of the WDFW (Director) that the gray wolf no longer meets the criteria for state designation as protected or endangered. When the Commission receives this notice, the Director must confirm that the county has met the criteria and, within six months of receipt of the notice, develop a management plan for the county or portion of a county where the criteria have been met. The Director must develop the management plan in collaboration with the county and any tribes within the county. The management plan must include collaboration with local law enforcement to receive and investigate reports of problem wildlife, ongoing monitoring of the population by the Department, and a conflict management plan. The Wolf Advisory Group and the Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative must be given an opportunity to review and provide comment on the plan.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 1, 2023.

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