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**HOUSE BILL 1698**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Lekanoff, Dent, Maycumber, Springer, Morgan, and Eslick

AN ACT Relating to providing flexibility for the department of fish and wildlife to collaborate with local governments to manage gray wolves; amending RCW 77.12.020; adding a new section to chapter 36.01 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds the majestic gray wolf to be a symbol of the wilderness and a marvel to all Washingtonians. The howl of the gray wolf, a song of nature's resilience, epitomizes their role as an apex predator. The gray wolf serves a crucial role in their ecosystem, particularly to species down the food chain. This in turn improves biodiversity, offering immense human benefits that are almost too great to be measured. The success in the revival of gray wolf populations in Washington has proven to be one of the most successful recoveries of an extirpated apex species in United States history. This should be celebrated and modeled for future recovery efforts. It is important to always look for ways to improve on our processes and further perfect our recovery efforts. In this way, other counties in our state should learn from the more successful counties that have more than achieved the lofty recovery goals placed before them. In order to maximize recovery efforts for all the vital species in Washington, we must allow those counties that have successfully recovered gray wolf populations to focus their efforts on other animals in danger of extinction.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 36.01 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department of fish and wildlife shall manage the gray wolf as if it has been removed from state designation as protected or endangered under RCW 77.12.020 within any county where the following criteria are met:

(a) The state meets the recovery objective of 15 breeding pairs in the state for at least three years;

(b) There are at least three documented breeding pairs in the county or portion of the county; and

(c) The gray wolf is not designated under the federal endangered species act as threatened or endangered in the county or portion of the county.

(2) When the criteria identified in subsection (1) of this section are met, the legislative body of the county must provide notice to the fish and wildlife commission and to the director of the department of fish and wildlife that the gray wolf no longer meets the criteria for state designation as protected or endangered under RCW 77.12.020 in that county.

(3) After a county acts under subsection (2) of this section, the county must enter into an interlocal agreement with the department of fish and wildlife and any tribes within the jurisdiction to collaboratively comanage the gray wolf, including collaborating with local law enforcement to receive and investigate reports of problem animals.

**Sec.**  RCW 77.12.020 and 2014 c 202 s 302 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The director shall investigate the habits and distribution of the various species of wildlife native to or adaptable to the habitats of the state. The commission shall determine whether a species should be managed by the department and, if so, classify it under this section.

(2) The commission may classify by rule wild animals as game animals and game animals as fur-bearing animals.

(3) The commission may classify by rule wild birds as game birds or predatory birds. All wild birds not otherwise classified are protected wildlife.

(4) In addition to those species listed in RCW 77.08.020, the commission may classify by rule as game fish other species of the class Osteichthyes that are commonly found in fresh water except those classified as food fish by the director.

(5) The director may recommend to the commission that a species of wildlife should not be hunted or fished. The commission may designate species of wildlife as protected.

(6) If the director determines that a species of wildlife is seriously threatened with extinction in the state of Washington, the director may request its designation as an endangered species. The commission may designate an endangered species.

(7) If the director determines that a species of the animal kingdom, not native to Washington, is dangerous to the environment or wildlife of the state, the director may request its designation as deleterious exotic wildlife. The commission may designate deleterious exotic wildlife.

(8) Upon recommendation by the director, the commission may develop a work plan to eradicate native aquatic species that threaten human health. Priority shall be given to water bodies that the department of health has classified as representing a threat to human health based on the presence of a native aquatic species.

(9) When the commission receives notice as described in section 2 of this act, the director must confirm that the county has attained the criteria and develop a management plan for gray wolves within that county or portion of county where the criteria have been met. Within six months of the receipt of notice, the director must recommend to the commission a management plan developed 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.

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