

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5343

As Passed Senate, February 12, 2025

Title: An act relating to the northeast Washington wolf-livestock management account.

Brief Description: Concerning the northeast Washington wolf-livestock management account.

Sponsors: Senators Short, Chapman, Dozier and Krishnadasan.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/27/25, 1/30/25 [DP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/12/25, 49-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the uses of the Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Account for wolf-livestock management and for grants to the sheriffs' offices of Stevens and Ferry counties to aid the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in the management of wolves.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Chapman, Chair; Krishnadasan, Vice Chair; Short, Ranking Member; Liias, Muzzall, Saldaña, Schoesler, Shewmake and Wagoner.

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

Background: Funds from the Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant Program may be used to deploy nonlethal wolf deterrence resources in any Washington county east of the crest of the Cascade Mountains that shares a border with Canada. All receipts, any legislative appropriations, private donations, or any other private or public source directed to the Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Grant Program

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must be deposited into the Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Management Account (account).

Current law provides that expenditures from the account may be used for the deployment of nonlethal wolf deterrence resources. Current law also provides that in the 2021-23 and 2023-25 fiscal biennia, expenditures from the account may be used for wolf-livestock management and for grants to the sheriffs' offices of Stevens and Ferry counties for providing a local wildlife specialist to aid the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in the management of wolves.

Summary of Bill: Expenditures from the account may be used for wolf-livestock management and grants to the sheriffs' offices of Stevens and Ferry counties for providing a local wildlife specialist to aid WDFW in the management of wolves.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: What this bill does is already ongoing through budget notes. The wildlife specialist position is a critical resource for the success of wolf management in Northeast Washington. This position builds significant trust among producers and is a big win for ranchers; Northeast Washington works as a team on this issue to make sure that the next generation is able to keep ranching.

The wildlife specialist not only builds trust but is critical for coordinating range riders and covering territory. The position regularly collaborates with other counties; it would be great to expand this type of position to other areas of the state that experience wolf conflict.

The amount of money that goes to this position is fairly small compared to the amount of funding that goes to range riders. If the funding for this position is not renewed the position will be lost, which would have a significant negative effect on public safety, trust between producers and WDFW, and wolf conservation. A third party review in 2023-25 gave high marks to the program generally and highlighted the importance of this position.

CON: Nonlethal deterrence like range riders and fencing have proven to be the most effective way of reducing conflicts. The current statute already funds nonlethal deterrence, this bill could divert funds away from nonlethal deterrent. There are other areas of the state, like Southwest Washington, that could use funding for nonlethal deterrents. Would urge auditing or monitoring of the fund.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Shelly Short, Prime Sponsor; Dave Hedrick, Ferry Conservation District; Jeff Dawson, NE Washington Rancher; Paula Swedeen, Conservation Northwest; Brad Manke, Stevens County Sheriff's Office.

CON: Francisco Santiago-Ávila, Washington Wildlife First.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.