

Maggie Topalian

My name is Maggie Topalian, and like so many other Americans, I am a lifelong animal lover who wants to see this country's wildlife populations restored to their natural, healthy levels. As such, I am writing in defense of Washington's wolves, who are still in dire need of protection. All efforts need to be going towards further wolf recovery and habitat preservation, not wasted on coming up with ways to exploit and abuse these irreplaceable animals under the euphemism of "managing" populations. Given that Washington's wolves are still very much endangered and nowhere near the goals already established under the current recovery plan, creating a "post-recovery" plan for wolves at this time is not only premature, but scientifically baseless and unethical. Instead of racing to create a post-delisting plan, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife must instead focus its attention on current wolf-management needs. This includes: (1) Resolving, through nonlethal means, conflicts between livestock and wolves, which are taking place in some of the state's best habitat for wolves; and (2) Conducting extensive public education on wolves. This is emphasized in the current plan but has not been done by you, despite the fact that all wolf experts say public education is the single most important action to take for successful wolf conservation. Additionally, under the current wolf plan and any future wolf plan, management guidance, policies and protocols — and especially those which could result in wolves being killed — must be developed through a science-based, public rule-making process that results in transparent, rational and enforceable strategies. Therefore I urge you to: (1) Stop cherry-picking science to justify wolf-killing; (2) Answer the global call by scientists to protect and conserve apex predators; and (3) Use every opportunity to extol the value of top predators in keeping nature healthy, and cease current messaging that prioritizes livestock over wolves. The public will fail to see any reason to coexist with wolves if the department fails to explain that wolves are ecologically important and worth conserving. Thank you for considering my comments.