

Pamela Gray

I live in Port Townsend, a town over run by deer. I love the deer, but hate to see them hobbling around because of car collisions, and getting caught in fences as they try to find something to eat (more and more fences are going up in efforts to protect landscaping, leaving little food, especially during a drought). The deer population is unhealthy, but we have no way to cull the herd to a sustainable size. I mention this because it reminds me that having no apex predator, except for human hunters (banned in town, of course) always creates an unhealthy, unsustainable population. Human hunters, unlike wolves, target the biggest prime animals instead of culling the weak, diseased, old, or sickly ones. Disease spreads. I would think the livestock owners would prefer not to expose their herds to disease from wild sources. Instead of attacking wolves which keep wildlife healthy, just pay livestock owners for any losses from wolves. They shouldn't be grazing in wild areas anyway. Creating a "post-recovery" plan for wolves at this time is premature, as Washington is still far from meeting the goals set forth in the current plan. 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.