

Mark Blitzer

I have been watching with great interest the return of the gray wolf to its former homelands in our state. This is not the time for so-called post-recovery plans--wolves are nowhere near full recovery in Washington. Existing goals have not been met, so why waste more time and funds on a plan that is premature? Focus on the now--not on an unknown future. 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. The vast majority of the citizens of Washington welcome the wolf. Coexistence can work--it must work, so plan for what can be. Thank you for considering my comments.