

Stephanie Christensen

I was born in Washington, grew up there, and the remainder of my family still lives there. I have been so distraught about how wolves have been treated in Washington, because I place a high value on all wildlife....including predators. Our wildlife is facing many pressures currently, including habitat loss , climate change, and - for many of them, intolerance and destructive practices on the part of the agricultural and livestock industries. Predators, especially wolves, are being targeted especially harshly in your state. It is your role as the agency tasked with managing wildlife, to educate the public about the critical role that predators play in balancing ecosystems, to educate in particular about the characteristics of predators such as wolves - that they are intelligent, social and family oriented, that they are not dangerous to people, and that they - in fact - are responsible for less than 1% of cattle losses. Creating a “post-recovery” plan for wolves at this time is premature, and 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. (4) There must be a thoughtful, intelligent approach to where livestock are allowed to graze in NW Washington, particularly on public lands. Grazing allotments should be amended and re-organized to move livestock away from prime wolf habitat and prevent conflicts. The recent pattern of allowing a single rancher to repetitively push for the killing of wolves while refusing to keep his livestock away from known wolf denning sites....is just despicable and must be ended. Thank you for considering my comments.