

Heather Henthorne

I have visited the Pacific Northwest many times. My mother was a native of Washington, and until I saw the state for myself, I could not fully appreciate the extraordinary natural beauty of the place. My view of wolves, and an understanding of the respect they deserve from us, began from my mother's love of all wild creatures of that area. She was the type of person whose idea of a good coffee table book was one with photos and stories of wolves. She and I visited a sanctuary for injured wolves and wolf-dog hybrids who could not live in the wild. I recall how thrilled she was to see the wolves and how we both felt that these maligned and misunderstood animals deserved much better treatment than we humans often afford them. Over the years, I have learned that wolves are not only majestic animals but an essential component of a healthy ecosystem. As our preference for a meat based diet dependent upon farming certain animals as "livestock" must yield to more nutritionally and environmentally sound dietary practices, it is particularly abhorrent to think of wolves being killed to facilitate and prop up an industry that should be decreasing. 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.