

Katherine Smith

As a Certified Wildlife Biologist who has worked many years in wolf country, observed them in the wild, and witnessed first hand their positive impacts on native ecosystems, I hope you will take my input as that of more than just a fan of wolves. I have also served as a USDA Research Wildlife Biologist in Alaska for the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station. I later managed a National Wildlife Refuge Complex for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and worked on plans for recovery of endangered species. My professional background and time in the field leaves me with grave concerns about this premature and ill-thought "Post-recovery Plan" at a time when the State's current plan is far from meeting its modest wolf recovery goals. How can the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (DF&G) claim wolves have recovered when there are as yet no wolves surviving in Zone 3 and elsewhere annual growth is stagnating? Relentless killing of wolves on public land by this department since the State's 2011 Wolf Plan has made a mess of a well-written, if scientifically dated plan that was already aiming at only socially acceptable numbers of wolves--not biologically advisable, stable or ecologically sound populations. Further, it appears that when wolf management was handed from the Wildlife Diversity Division to the Game Management Division, a strong anti-predator mindset took hold. Under the banner of supposedly protecting deer, elk and other popular game animals from predation, wolves have been unfairly targeted. WA State's overzealous livestock protection protocol has also lead to the wiping out of entire packs based on the demands of a handful of overly influential cattle operations. I find it shameful that the State's wolf killings on behalf of private interests were undertaken without adhering to the existing plan's stated protocol, and certainly without honest accountability to the public. I am concerned that unsustainable wolf-culling and other violations of the State's SEPA and APA regulations will only abate with an overhaul of the DF&G. Washington needs to return to a more science-based and "non-game" management focus. We must hold the state agency that makes and enforces wolf rules responsive to the full public--a public that surveys as Pro-Wolf. If DF&G must cater to operations grazing on public lands then they must also laser-focus on resolving livestock conflicts through non-lethal means. People are tired of the State-sanctioned slaughter and the flimsy excuses that accompany it. The Department needs to educate their own on wolves and to update public information on the many positive wolf-ungulate interactions that have been well-documented in recent years. The current mindset promulgated by DF&G is old and misinformed. And perhaps foremost, rather than pushing a premature "post-delisting" plan, the Department of Fish and Wildlife needs to focus on current wolf-management problems and promote an informed and positive view of these predators. Extensive public education on the value of wolves and their beneficial relationships to other wildlife is desperately needed. All the public hears now is misinformation from hunting lobbies and self-serving livestock interests. Wolves will never be successfully conserved without an honest accounting of their place in Pacific Northwest ecosystems and their importance in our cultures. Not only our maligned wolves, but also our public, deserve more honest appraisal and fairer treatment from our State employees. Thank you for working toward this for all of Washington's residents.