

Forest Shomer

As a longtime resident of the Olympic Peninsula, I favor WDFW policies that ultimately enable the natural re-inhabitation of the Olympic Mountains by wolves. By 'natural' I mean their tendency to expand their range when not hunted down, and start new family units, as we can see in the case of re-inhabitation of Oregon that enabled the first wolves to return to California in 90 years.

In the late 1970s I lived across the road from a wolf colony-in-captivity here on the Peninsula (Gardiner, WA); while none of the wolves ever entered the wild, their presence and daily howls seemed like a missing piece of the local fauna, rediscovered. In this area, wolves would fill the vacant niche of a predator that can take down elk and deer, which vastly overwhelm the available browse in absence of a predator.

I fully understand the dilemma in Eastern Washington of how wolves and cattle may live near each other. The essence of that is that while cattle can live inside fenced range instead of open range, wolves must have wild back-country as they have from time immemorial. I suggest a combination of WDFW assistance to ranchers to construct more cattle-confining fencing, together with a policy to reimburse ranchers for any cattle taken down on state or federal land, by wolves. That provides wolves with natural habitat, and provides ranchers with more than one option to protect or at least retain the value of their cattle.

What is not acceptable in the long term, is to continue to allow ranchers to use public land for grazing, while wolves are at risk of being trapped or gunned down doing what wolves do, on public land. It's a privilege that may have been OK in Washington's early years but is clearly obsolete now.