

Nov 12

Whom ~~its~~ may concern:

I do not advocate for the killing of all our state's wolves. I do not believe in their elimination. I do believe in population control. There are too many wolves in Northeast Washington. I believe in fairness, as it is now it is not fair. The article I am sending, written by a ex-college professor is facts and numbers. The article lists sources of his ~~so~~ information. Like all good research should do. Fair for wolves and agriculture grazers is created by balanced management.

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Inside the Outdoors: The wolves of Washington

By JIM HUCKABAY Contributing Columnist Nov 6, 2019

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HABITAT PROGRAM

An ever more interesting conversation, this discussion of wolves and their status, behavior, and management here in our state. There seems almost no action ranchers in now-wolf-country, and the wildlife managers of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), can propose or take to deal with livestock depredation that doesn't trigger protest and a court battle. The conflict over DFW policy has been bubbling over the past decade and more.

Over the years since the 2009 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), titled "Wolf Conservation and Management Plan for Washington" was released, a number of wolves and entire packs have been killed after persistently preying upon domestic livestock. Nearly all of the lethal removals have been in and around the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington. The removals took place following one or another DFW policy — each of which required that stockmen carry out some extensive level of non-lethal means of separating livestock and wolves over some time period. The latest removal in the Colville area was in August, just before a restraining order was issued in a Seattle courtroom.

As a geographer and lifelong wildlife nut, the management goals for wolves in our state — in the context of other western state wolf recovery goals — seemed to me so unrealistic that conflicts were inevitable. Consider the following bit of western state geography (areas suitable wolf habitat are from the Federal Register (02/08/07, Vol. 72, Num. 26), and the human populations are from the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau.

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Montana held 958,000 humans (6.6 per square mile) and 40, 924 square miles of suitable wolf habitat. Wyoming had 523,000 people (5.4 per square mile) with 29, 808 square miles of wolf ground. Idaho, with its 1,499, 000 people (18.1 per square mile), has wolf habitat totaling 31,586 square miles. Washington's population was 6,468,000 (97.2 people per square mile). Our wolf habitat: 297 square miles in the eastern one-third and "scattered habitat in small isolated areas of the Okanogan, marginal habitat both north and south of Mount Rainier, and a large area of habitat in and around the Olympic National Park," adding up to something around 4,500 square miles.

Thus, in Washington we have a human population of four to thirteen times the other "wolf" states, a population density of five to nineteen times theirs, and "suitable habitat" only eleven to 15 percent of theirs. Yet, in each of the other states, the goal for delisting was 100 wolves (10 breeding pairs), while Washington's goal was 15 breeding pairs/packs of wolves (about 150 animals) before delisting. The clock has been ticking ever louder over the past decade.

At last 2018 population survey, DFW biologists estimated Washington's wolf population at a minimum of 126 individuals, 27 packs, and 15 successful breeding pairs.

The number of wolves across the state has reached a point that many are pushing for delisting of wolves from any statethreatened or endangered list, and turning wolf management over to DFW — similar to management in other western states. To that end, DFW officials have begun a broad public outreach effort.

In late summer wildlife officials scheduled a series of 14 open public meetings across the state to begin assessing possible changes to the state's wolf-management policy. Within a week or two, officials changed those meetings to online discussions, citing a fear of violence rising from a number of unspecified threats of both violence and disruption.

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Those online meetings (and the face to face meetings formerly scheduled) were integral to the multi-year State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) process DFW has underway to develop a post-recovery wolf management and conservation plan. The plan development includes an extensive public outreach component, and you will find abundant information on wolf post-recovery planning on DFW's website. Fact sheets, summaries and frequently asked questions are at wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/20190920_wolf_post-recovery_plan_faq.pdf. An online comment form is available at wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/wolf_post-recovery_plan_scoping_comment_form_0_0.pdf. Note that the form can be printed and mailed (as can general comments) to Lisa Wood, SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Habitat Program, Protection Division, P.O. Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504. (Mailed comments must be postmarked by Nov. 15.)

After the Nov. 15 deadline, your next opportunity will come once the agency drafts an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in late 2020. That draft will evaluate actions, alternatives, and impacts related to long-term wolf conservation and management.

Want to know about the wolves here in Paradise? This coming Monday evening (Nov. 11) Steve Wetzel (DFW Wildlife Conflict Specialist), with DFW Statewide Wolf Biologist Ben Maletzke will be speaking of the Wolves of Kittitas County. This is the program for the monthly meeting of the 100-year-old Kittitas County Field & Stream Club, at the Hal Holmes Center, 7:00 p.m. You and your friends are welcome for what promises to be a very interesting Veteran's Day evening.

Jim Huckabay is retired from the Department of Geography at Central. His "WILD WINDS and Other Tales of Growing Up in the Outdoor West" is available online and at bookstores. Contact Jim and join in discussions at www.insidetheoutdoors.com.

