

Cynthia Burton

I am a resident of Washington State and am concerned about your agency's push for a post-recovery wolf plan. Why the hurry? The mere fact that WA State has free roaming wolves is proof that we did something right. Now we must take appropriate steps to assure these critical instruments of ecological balance continue to thrive and perform their function in our wild and open spaces. It is understandable that the agency would want to protect vulnerable industries, but do not overreach. These animals have a value to our state's ecosystems that is greater than their impact on livestock. So while the agency's & livestock industry's concerns are valid --- they do not warrant lethal methods. Be more creative in your prevention concepts & put people (who created the problem) at the center of the solution, such as diligence in care & protection of livestock or seek avoidance. Holding wolves accountable for killing animals that they consider prey is not rational, it is what predators do. 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.