
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1698

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By House Agriculture and Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Lekanoff, Dent, Maycumber, Springer, Morgan, and Eslick)

READ FIRST TIME 02/17/23.

1 AN ACT Relating to providing flexibility for the department of
2 fish and wildlife to collaborate with local governments to manage
3 gray wolves; adding a new section to chapter 36.01 RCW; adding a new
4 section to chapter 77.36 RCW; and creating a new section.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds the majestic gray
7 wolf to be a symbol of the wilderness and a marvel to all
8 Washingtonians. The howl of the gray wolf, a song of nature's
9 resilience, epitomizes their role as an apex predator. The gray wolf
10 serves a crucial role in their ecosystem, particularly to species
11 down the food chain. This in turn improves biodiversity, offering
12 immense human benefits that are almost too great to be measured. The
13 success in the revival of gray wolf populations in Washington has
14 proven to be one of the most successful recoveries of an extirpated
15 apex species in United States history. This should be celebrated and
16 modeled for future recovery efforts. It is important to always look
17 for ways to improve on our processes and further perfect our recovery
18 efforts. In this way, other counties in our state should learn from
19 the more successful counties that have more than achieved the lofty
20 recovery goals placed before them. In order to maximize recovery
21 efforts for all the vital species in Washington, we must allow those

1 counties that have successfully recovered gray wolf populations to
2 focus their efforts on other animals in danger of extinction.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 36.01
4 RCW to read as follows:

5 (1) The department of fish and wildlife shall manage the gray
6 wolf as if it has been removed from state designation as endangered
7 under RCW 77.12.020 within any county where the gray wolf is not
8 designated under the federal endangered species act as threatened or
9 endangered in the county or portion of the county and the following
10 criteria are met:

11 (a) The state meets the recovery objective of 15 breeding pairs
12 in the state for at least three years; and

13 (b) There are at least three documented breeding pairs in the
14 county or portion of the county where the gray wolf is not designated
15 under the federal endangered species act as threatened or endangered.

16 (2) When the criteria identified in subsection (1) of this
17 section are met, the legislative body of the county must provide
18 notice to the fish and wildlife commission and to the director of the
19 department of fish and wildlife that the gray wolf no longer meets
20 the criteria for state designation as endangered under RCW 77.12.020
21 in that county.

22 (3) After a county acts under subsection (2) of this section, the
23 county must enter into an interlocal agreement with the department of
24 fish and wildlife and any tribes within the jurisdiction to
25 collaboratively comanage the gray wolf in accordance with a regional
26 plan developed pursuant to section 3 of this act, including
27 collaborating with local law enforcement to receive and investigate
28 reports of problem animals.

29 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 77.36
30 RCW to read as follows:

31 (1) Once a county acts under section 2(2) of this act, the
32 department shall form a work group to develop a regional plan for
33 gray wolf management in the county or portion of the county that
34 meets the criteria in section 2(2) of this act.

35 (2) Members of the work group must include representatives of
36 county cattlemen organizations, representatives of county
37 governments, a representative from a regional nonprofit organization
38 that operates range riding and other year-round wolf and livestock

1 conflict avoidance tactics in northeast Washington, and a
2 representative from a conservation nonprofit. The department shall
3 invite affected Indian tribes to participate and shall give affected
4 Indian tribes the opportunity to review drafts of the plan before it
5 is completed. The department is encouraged to invite representatives
6 of the United States forest service. The department shall hire an
7 outside third-party neutral facilitator to ensure effective
8 functioning of the work group.

9 (3) At a minimum, the plan must address the following objectives:

10 (a) Increased cooperation with input from county governments,
11 cattlemen associations, and local organizations providing range
12 riding and other conflict deterrence efforts with respect to the
13 methods and approaches to minimizing impacts to livestock production;

14 (b) Minimization of livestock loss and economically costly stress
15 on livestock and minimizing the need for lethal control of wolves;

16 (c) Improved responsiveness from the department on planning
17 proactive deterrence for ranchers;

18 (d) Faster response time from the department when lethal control
19 is required;

20 (e) Habitat improvement for ungulate populations;

21 (f) An improved livestock loss and damage compensation program;
22 and

23 (g) Maintaining recovery objectives and an overall stable wolf
24 population in the region.

25 (4) The department shall complete and implement the regional plan
26 within six months and may revise the plan periodically as conditions
27 change. If the work group does not reach agreement on the regional
28 plan within six months, a minority report must be included.

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