

**Talking Points**  
**House Bill 1698, the “Wolf Hunting Bill”**

- House Bill 1698 overrides science-based wildlife management to give county officials undue influence over endangered wildlife. The bill sets a dangerous precedent that could have far-reaching impacts for Washington’s other protected species. Endangered wildlife must be protected by the state in the public trust, not decimated by localized fears and animus.
- House Bill 1698 is a thinly disguised wolf hunting bill. It would remove state protections for endangered wolves in almost every county where wolves now live and allow them to be managed by the same county officials who have publicly proclaimed their desire to decimate the wolf population through public hunting and liberal “lethal management.”
- Wolves have not recovered in Washington. According to the [Washington Wolf Conservation & Management Plan](#), wolves should be established in 15 breeding pairs present in the state for at least three years, with at least 4 in eastern Washington, 4 in the northern Cascades, and 4 in the southern Cascades/northwest coastal area. As of the last annual wolf report, there were still not any successful breeding pairs in the southern Cascades/northwest coastal area.
- Washington needs to maintain a healthy population of wolves in the Northeast corner of the state to achieve statewide recovery. The Management Plan always anticipated that wolf recovery would start in one region, and then wolves would disperse from that area to the rest of the state. The state population has not achieved recovery until we have a healthy and resilient wolf population in suitable wolf habitat throughout the different regions of the state.
- Washington does not have too many wolves. At last count, there were only 206 wolves in 33 packs in the entire state. This is a fragile population that needs continued protection. At one time, Washington had a population of an estimated **5,000 wolves**, which were completely exterminated by the same fear and animus that has motivated HB 1698. We cannot let history repeat itself.
- The first section of House Bill 1698 purports to value wolves and their ecological benefits, claiming that counties that have “successfully recovered” wolves need to “focus their efforts on other animals in danger of extinction.” But wolves do not “recover” one county at a time—they must meet statewide recovery objectives. A focus on wolves does not impede the recovery of other species, and there is nothing in the bill about helping to recover any other species.

- House Bill 1698 does not consider the connectivity of wolf populations beyond the narrow boundaries of county lines. Wolves do not recognize county lines, and they do not “recover” one county at a time. Reducing the wolf population in the Northeast would delay recovery by reducing the likelihood that dispersing wolves will colonize other parts of the state. Limiting killing of wolves is particularly important for recovering populations since disrupting pack social structure can postpone range expansion by reducing annual pup recruitment and the number of dispersal-aged individuals, and potentially lead to pack dissolution.
- House Bill 1698 “celebrates” wolf recovery, but Washington’s wolves have not recovered. In fact, they are facing more dangers than ever. In its initial reports, the Department of Fish and Wildlife counted 27 wolf mortalities in 2022, and that is before we know the number of wolves killed in the legal tribal hunt by members of the Colville tribe. When the final numbers are in, they will probably reveal that more than 20% of the total state wolf population was killed last year.
- Wolf poaching dramatically increased in Northeast Washington last year, with at least six wolves reportedly poisoned in Ferry County, in addition to three other wolf deaths under investigation and four wolves that were killed under a loosely interpreted “caught in the act” provision. And those are just the ones that we know about—most poaching is never discovered or reported. Giving the counties local control of wolves would not make people more accepting of wolves—to the contrary, studies show that when protections are loosened and hunting is allowed, poaching also increases.
- House Bill 1698 would contravene the conservative statewide recovery standards set by the Wolf Conservation & Management Plan and violate the commitment the legislature made when it passed [House Bill 2097 in 2019](#), when the legislature assured the public of its “intent to support full recovery of gray wolves in Washington state in accordance with the department of fish and wildlife’s 2011 wolf recovery and management plan and state law.”
- House Bill 1698 shuts the public out of wolf management decisions. Normally, the public is allowed to review and comment on proposals for status changes for endangered species, which are also examined under the State Environmental Policy Act. Under House Bill 1698, the only entities that will have the opportunity to review county wolf plans are a single private agriculture organization, the Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative, and the state “Wolf Advisory Group,” a body dominated by hunting and ranching interests.

- This drastic action is not necessary to help the small number of livestock owners who are affected by wolf predations each year. The most effective way for ranchers to protect their livestock from all carnivores, including wolves, is to adjust their husbandry practices and employ nonlethal deterrents. Both the state and private organizations offer significant support to advise livestock owners on improving their fencing and carcass sanitation practices and help provide range riders to protect cattle grazing on pastures and rangelands. In addition, there is a state compensation fund to pay owners for livestock lost to wolves.
- Wolves are concentrated in the Northeast because it is prime wolf country. Most packs are concentrated in and around Colville National Forest, a rugged, thickly treed area which is just where wolves belong. The state already kills entire packs in the Colville National Forest to protect cattle that are left to wander unprotected among its vast grazing allotments. The wolves in this area should be left alone to recover, not beset by even more trappers and hunters.