

Post Recovery Wolf Conservation & Management Scoping Review and Alternatives Guidance

Purpose

This guidance focuses on concepts drawn from an analysis of public scoping input that the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission (commission) seeks to have included in the SEPA alternatives considered during wolf post-recovery conservation and management plan development. It is not about the state's gray wolf listing decision, which is a separate process. The concepts sought by the commission are not entirely comprehensive. There may be additional alternatives identified by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) staff during plan development. The guidance does eliminate some scoping suggestions (e.g., wolves should be extirpated, no lethal removal, special classification, dedicated research agenda). It also notes that some of the scoping categories are not part of an environmental analysis but may be considered in a post-recovery plan.

The plural "alternatives" is used throughout this document in recognition that several alternatives will be developed for each included category. The guidance is not intended to mean that the each alternative will include all of the suggested concepts within a given category but rather, the concepts will be captured in at least one alternative.

Guiding Principles

The overarching guiding principle for post-recovery wolf plan development is: Washington will maintain a sustainable wolf population that will be managed, including lethal removal when deemed necessary. In addition, wolf management will be normalized, generally using processes and strategies that are applied to other wildlife species, communities, and habitats.

Outside of the scoping categories, the department will work with federal and state agencies, tribal governments, landowners, and NGOs to delineate roles and responsibilities regarding wolves on the landscape as part of the plan. An example is various agencies' and others' roles and responsibilities in wolf-livestock conflict management.

Scoping category sidebars, including priority for and depth of inclusion in alternatives

Collaborative process-More important during plan development. Consider an alternative that is modeled on the department's use of stakeholder advisory committees, perhaps considering a carnivore advisory committee.

Compensation- Livestock losses compensation is not part of an environmental analysis but may be considered in a post-recovery plan. The commission notes that the department has an existing conflict damages program that could include wolf losses. There may need to be some sort of management unit approach in regard to wolves.

Conservation and management-Key, high priority plank that encompasses a number of issues raised in scoping. There will likely be sub-topics within this category as staff proceeds with development of alternatives. The commission and its wolf subcommittee intend to remain engaged with this category as planning proceeds. In addition, alternatives within this category may encompass some of the other categories. Alternatives should weave in ungulate and other big game management, taking an integrated multi-species, ecosystems approach. Wolf management should be no more or less special than cougars or bears. Alternatives should consider regional approaches through something like management units. Alternatives should not be too prescriptive and allow nimbleness. Alternatives should include adaptive management.

Diseases in wolves-To be included in alternatives by staff to meet any legal standards of the environmental impact analysis.

Ecotourism-Not mission critical. Beyond our mandate. Does not need alternatives.

Education and outreach-We do this anyway as routine department functions. It does not need alternatives but can be called out in the partnership roles and responsibilities discussion.

Funding and economic impact-These are not issues that are part of an environmental analysis. To the degree that funding might be included in a post-recovery plan, the commission concludes that a recovered wolves should not receive greater funding priority than other carnivores and especially than more imperiled species populations. The commission does not call for economic impact to be included in the post-recovery plan.

Land management-High priority plank. Alternatives should focus on connectivity and avoidance of isolated populations. Alternatives should consider human presence and integrated species management. Alternatives should recognize that land ownership impacts land management options and it cannot be the basis of alternatives where land management is outside the scope of the department's authority, such as USFS practices and how they can affect wolf management decisions. Alternatives should consider the scoping comments about wolf-free zones.

Legal status, protections and hunting-High priority plank that needs to be addressed head on in the alternatives. Alternatives should not include any kind of special classification. Alternatives should include both game and non-game classifications as well as various kinds of hunting seasons and strategies and closed seasons.

Plan development-Does not need alternatives.

Predator-prey relations-Needs to be a plank but may tie into other categories (e.g., conservation and management, research). Alternatives should consider management decisions around imperiled species (including regionally) in the context of integrated wildlife management. Alternatives should consider more flexible link to Game Management Plan, clarifying the definition of an imperiled herd and triggering management around predation.

Research-Needs to be a plank. Alternatives should not include a specific research agenda. Alternatives should include population monitoring strategies and their link to status reviews. Alternatives should look at the use of both Washington-based and out-of-state research results for use in management. Alternatives should look at the application of research to adaptive management.

Translocation-The translocation SEPA analysis needs to proceed so that this tool is in the toolbox.

Wolf-livestock conflict-Needs to be a plank but may tie into other categories. Alternatives should include approaches that are the same as other species' conflict management. Alternatives should include different, less prescriptive approaches to conflict management that may involve non-department funding and management sources, including the responsibility for evaluating and monitoring non-lethal tools.