



## Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

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**Meeting date:**

3/16/2024

**Agenda item:**

Periodic Status Review for the Gray Wolf – Briefing and Public Hearing

**Presenter(s):**

Julia Smith, Endangered Species Recovery Section Manager

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**Background summary:**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is proposing to reclassify the gray wolf in the state of Washington. WDFW bases its proposal to reclassify the gray wolf as Sensitive on scientific information contained in the Periodic Status Review for the Gray Wolf (PSR; available at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02427>). This report summarizes evidence that the wolf population no longer meets the definition of Endangered in the state and should be reclassified as a Sensitive species. Based on 14 consecutive years of population growth, population modeling predictions that indicate Washington’s wolf population is robust and will continue to grow and expand its range (including in the Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast recovery region), and ongoing state and federal protections, WDFW proposes to reclassify the wolf to indicate that the wolf does not meet the definition of State Endangered, which requires that the species is “seriously threatened with extinction” (WAC 220-610-110). WDFW proposes to reclassify the wolf to State Sensitive, “vulnerable or declining and is likely to become endangered or threatened in a significant portion of its range within the state without cooperative management or removal of threats” (WAC 220-610-110). This proposed reclassification reflects the significant progress toward recovery that Washington’s wolf population has made since the original state listing in 1980 but recognizes that wolves remain vulnerable in western Washington and should continue to be managed for recovery within the state as a protected species.

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**Staff recommendation:**

WDFW staff recommend the gray wolf be reclassified from State Endangered to State Sensitive status.

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**Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:**

This proposed change, if adopted, would change the gray wolf from endangered status under WAC 220-610-010 to sensitive status under WAC 220-200-100. The anticipated effects of the proposed rule amendments would be minimal. Protective measures will remain in effect for wolves in Washington if the proposed rule amendments are approved. Changing the classification of wolves to state Sensitive status would continue to protect them

from unlawful take under Chapter 77.15 RCW. The species would continue to be protected from malicious and intentional harassment. RCW 77.15.130 outlines that Sensitive wildlife shall not be hunted, taken, or harassed. In addition, the proposed Sensitive status is a sub-category of protected wildlife, which “shall not be hunted or fished.” RCW 77.08.010(52); 77.12.020(5). Wolves would also remain on the list of Priority Habitats and Species (PHS). Under state law (RCW 77.12.395), proactive nonlethal deterrents must be included in development of conflict mitigation guidelines regardless of listing status.

Appendix A of the PSR document shows differences in conservation/management provisions for wolves under endangered and protected state species classifications and can assist policy makers in weighing the implications of future management actions. WDFW received comments through the Draft Periodic Status Review public process (May 18 – Aug. 16, 2023) discussed in Appendix B of the PSR document.

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**Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:**

None.

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**Public involvement process used and what you learned:**

See Background and Commission Engagement Document and Appendix B of the Final Periodic Status Review.

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**Action requested and/or proposed next steps:**

Briefing and public comment only.

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**Draft motion language:**

Briefing and public comment only.

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**Post decision communications plan:**

Website update, news release, WAC updates.

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*Form revised 1-20-21*