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# Washington set to defend shooting wolves

- By DON JENKINS Capital Press

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A Thurston County, Wash., judge will hear arguments Friday over the state Department of Wildlife's protocol for culling wolves.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Washington ranchers need quick relief from livestock-attacking wolves or else wolf recovery won't succeed as producers resort to "traditional self-help," according to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, as it prepares to defend its lethal-removal protocol in court.

In a hearing set for Friday in Thurston County, Fish and Wildlife is expected to argue that its practice of culling wolfpacks that repeatedly prey on cattle or sheep keeps rural residents from rebelling.

"Community tolerance for wolves has been and continues to be the great obstacle WDFW must overcome to ensure their survival," Fish and Wildlife states in a written argument.

The hearing will be on a motion by Fish and Wildlife to dismiss key claims by the Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands. The groups allege the State Environmental Policy Act requires the department to prepare an environmental impact statement before shooting wolves. State law asks agencies to aspire to finish the review in no more than two years.

Wolf advocates have filed a similar lawsuit in King County.

Fish and Wildlife argues it has broad authority to control dangerous wildlife and that emergency responses are exempt from lengthy environmental reviews.

"When people call WDFW for help dealing with destructive wildlife, they expect WDFW will come to their aid, not embark on an odyssey of draft proposals, public meetings, policy debates and litigated disputes," according to the department's written arguments.

The department warns such a response would be "the type of social-contract breaching inaction sure to drive people to the type of traditional self-help that needlessly jeopardizes their freedom as well as the recovery of Washington's wolves."

Fish and Wildlife has sought to build widespread support for lethal removal, even among conservation groups. Lawsuits have resulted, nevertheless.

Environmental groups have been mostly unsuccessful in obtaining emergency restraining orders to stop the department from shooting wolves. Courts have yet to rule, however, after a thorough review of the department's actions.

The protocol guides the department's director, Kelly Susewind, in deciding whether to authorize lethal removal. It does not bind the department to shooting wolves.

The protocol is being challenged in counties without any documented wolves. In court documents, Fish and Wildlife says it's natural for people in wolf country to have a different view than environmental groups.

"Daily proximity to wolves may distinguish them from petitioners, who understandably long to hear 'wolves howling' during recreational trips to lands petitioners see as 'backcountry,'" according to the department's written arguments.

The environmental groups called that a "backhanded slap" at supposedly naive city folks. They have submitted statements from three northeast Washington residents who say they welcome the return of wolves.

The groups argue that Fish and Wildlife enforcement officers respond to emergencies, while killing wolves is the work of "biologists, bureaucrats and conflict specialists who designed the protocol and issue kill orders.