

Sophia Ressler: Cruel Washington wolf killing also wastes taxpayer money

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When it comes to killing Washington's endangered wolves, state officials display a certain cruel efficiency. But their brisk, brutal approach has costs beyond the growing body count.

Our wildlife agency has wasted millions in taxpayer dollars to create wolf management policies it has chosen not to follow.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife paid roughly \$1.2million to a facilitator and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on killing wolves plus other steps to help the agency's handpicked Wolf Advisory Group cooperate and advise officials on minimizing conflicts between livestock and wolves. This group also recommends when to kill wolves.

Yet the state's wolf killing has only intensified since the group was created in 2013. The department has killed eight wolves this year alone. Right now, the agency has a kill order pending for members of another pack.

Since the Wolf Advisory Group's formation in 2013, the agency has killed nearly four times as many wolves as it killed before the group's inception.

One of the group's primary jobs is helping establish the "wolf-livestock interaction protocol," which guides decisions on killing wolves if they've injured or killed livestock.

Suggestions in the protocol include having at least two nonlethal deterrents in place to prevent conflicts before officials consider destroying wolves.

But notes from a recent Department of Fish and Wildlife call, obtained by our organization, show nonlethals were indeed *not* in place before the agency obliterated the Old Profanity Territory wolf family in July and August.

Those killings were done on behalf of one particular livestock company. In fact, it is the same company for which the wildlife department has killed 26 individual wolves, in the process wiping out four entire wolf packs.

It's obvious the livestock operators were not trying to prevent conflicts. Instead, this for-profit outfit was relying on the department to retaliate for completely predictable livestock deaths in some of Washington's best wolf habitat. This area is full of deer and elk – common prey animals – as well as steep slopes and downed timber that make cattle-monitoring difficult.

This isn't the first time the department has falsely claimed expectations for nonlethals were met before slaughtering wolves for this company. During a kill operation on this same pack last fall, the department's own reports revealed that injured calves had been left in the field for a week or more, despite officials saying they were removed.

The department also claimed cattle were moved away from areas with pups, where all the conflicts were happening, yet in court admitted that 40 cows and calves were still present at that location.

Clearly, the agency is using the advisory group as a greenwashing vehicle for its wolf killing.

With their handpicked advisory group, officials avoided a public rule-making process and side-stepped outside scrutiny. It's time for a new wolf protocol to be made through an open, public process.

Sophia Ressler is the Washington wildlife advocate and staff attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity