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Poll Shows Gulf Between Washington Voters and State Fish and Wildlife Management

Voters oppose spring bear hunting and state wolf policies and support more inclusive approach

Seattle, WA – A [new poll](#) commissioned by [Washington Wildlife First](#) reveals that Washington voters do not support many of the policies of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, and that they overwhelmingly favor a more inclusive Department that represents all the people of the state.

Public Policy Polling surveyed 713 registered Washington voters on October 17-18, 2022, resulting in a poll with a margin of error of +/- 3.7%. The poll asked voters about their views on specific wildlife issues as well as their general attitudes toward state fish and wildlife management.

“We found that the Washington public opposes many of the Department’s policies, particularly its management of large carnivores,” says Samantha Bruegger, executive director of Washington Wildlife First, the organization that commissioned the poll. “This poll demonstrates how out of touch the Department has become with the interests and values of Washingtonians.”

For example, the poll found that 80% of Washington voters oppose spring bear hunting, while only 8% support it. The result was similar in households with active hunters, with 69% of those respondents opposing the spring bear hunt. It was also consistent in most areas of the state, with 81% opposing spring bear hunting in King County compared to 77% in eastern Washington.

For the first time in decades, the Fish and Wildlife Commission refused to approve the 2022 spring bear hunt proposed by Department management. The Commission, composed of nine citizens appointed by the Governor, has supervisory authority over the Department and must approve all fish and wildlife management rules—but has historically functioned as little more than a rubber stamp for management proposals. However, management has refused to take “no” for an answer: Director Kelly Susewind, himself a bear hunter, has [vowed](#) to bring back the controversial trophy hunt. The Commission is scheduled to discuss the issue again on November 18.

“We applaud the Commission for standing firm and refusing to approve the spring bear proposal when management could not substantiate its claimed need for the hunt,” says Bruegger. “Management insists the spring bear ‘opportunity’ is very important to the state’s hunters, and we often hear it is only opposed by city dwellers in Seattle. But this poll shows Washingtonians *throughout* the state—including those who hunt and fish—favor ending this problematic hunt.”

The survey also found that just 38% of Washingtonians support killing state endangered wolves in response to predations on cattle. That support plummets when voters are asked if wolves should be killed in certain circumstances: only 25% support killing wolves for preying on cattle grazing on state forest land, only 22% support killing wolves when owners have not taken reasonable steps to protect livestock, and only 19% support killing wolves when cattle are grazing near wolf dens.

These results are consistent with a recent poll conducted for the Department by [Responsive Management](#), which found that 80% of Washingtonians support maintaining sustainable predator populations, while just 42% favor killing predators to reduce loss of domestic animals.

“The poll shows that if the public knew the facts, it would be very troubled by the decisions the Department has made to kill state endangered wolves,” says Washington Wildlife First Board President Claire Loeb Davis, who works as an attorney for Animal and Earth Advocates and has sued the Department several times for violating its internal protocols when deciding to kill wolves.

“The Department has killed 41 wolves since 2012, and roughly 85% of these kill orders came after wolves had conflicts with livestock on public forest land. Far too often, the Department killed wolves when it knew livestock owners had done little or nothing to protect their cattle, and even when it knew the cattle were grazing on top of core wolf areas like den sites. All these factors have contributed to the Department’s continual targeting of wolf packs in the Colville National Forest, including the Profanity Peak, Togo, and OPT packs,” Davis says.

Meanwhile, the poll revealed that only 16% of state voters support the Department’s rules allowing coyote to be hunted year-round with few restrictions and no bag limits, and only 12% support the rules allowing landowners to trap and kill beavers in addition to a general beaver trapping season.

“For decades, these sorts of policies have been shaped around the demands of a vocal minority of the hunting community, which in turn represents just over 2% of the Washington population,” Bruegger says. “Washington voters say loud and clear that this approach is not acceptable.”

In fact, 67% of state voters believe all Washingtonians should have an equal say in fish and wildlife management, while only 25% believe hunters and anglers should have a greater voice. Meanwhile, only 16% think Governor Jay Inslee should prioritize the appointment of hunters and anglers to the Commission, while half believe he should appoint diverse people to reflect the values and interests of *all* Washingtonians, and 25% say he should primarily appoint conservationists.

“Washington voters agree that the Department’s responsibility is to represent the interests of *all* Washingtonians—that includes hunters and anglers, but it is not limited to them,” Bruegger says.

Davis hopes the Governor will consider these results when deciding how to fill the three Commission seats that will become open in December, pointing out that the poll showed that most Washingtonians care “a great deal” about the protection and management of the state’s fish and wildlife, while nearly half are “very concerned” about the global biodiversity crisis.

“I hope the Governor takes note of how much Washingtonians care about these issues, even though institutional barriers have made it difficult for people who do not hunt or fish to have a voice,” Davis says. “As the state faces the dual crises of climate change and global biodiversity loss, it is time to abandon the model of a ‘game’ department that exists to serve hunters and realize that we all have a stake in the health of our fish and wildlife populations, and we all should have a voice.”