

# Washington wolf population increased only 11% after another season of killing

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A member of the Smackout pack. Photo courtesy of Carter Niemeyer

Washington's wolf population increased by just 11% in 2019, according to [figures](#) released today by the Washington Department of Fish and

Wildlife—dramatically less than what is needed to sustain the healthy growth of a wolf population into additional good wolf habitat across the state.

It was the third straight year the [growth rate](#) for Washington's wolf [population](#) was well below the baseline recovery rate of 30%. The small increase comes after another season of state-agency killing in the Kettle Range, including elimination of the entire eight-member Old Profanity Territory pack.

The 2019 minimum population was reported at 108, an 11% rise from 2018's reported minimum population of 97 [wolves](#). The number of Washington's packs fell from 22 to 21, and breeding pairs likewise decreased, from 11 to 10 at the end of 2019.

"Washington's wildlife agency keeps killing wolves, so it's no wonder the population is struggling," said Sophia Ressler, a Washington wildlife advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity. "For these wolves to have a fighting chance at recovery, state managers need to stop slaughtering them and establish a management plan that uses nonlethal measures to prevent livestock-wolf conflict."

The Old Profanity Territory Pack was killed last summer on behalf of one livestock owner. Twenty-six of the state's endangered wolves have now been killed on this owner's behalf. Department of Fish and Wildlife documents reveal that this livestock owner failed to fully implement nonlethal techniques proven to effectively prevent conflict between livestock and wolves.

Unlike previous years, the state's figures for 2019 do not include a confirmed count of wolves by the Colville tribe, since the tribe did not conduct any official survey of its wolf population last year.

Today's report also indicated that at least 21 wolves died this year, the highest number of wolf mortalities since the state took over wolf management in the eastern one-third of Washington from the federal government in 2011. Wolf mortalities in 2019 were nearly double those in 2018, and at least 19 of the 21 were human-caused. Nearly 50% of the human-caused deaths were due to state agency killing of wolves in response to conflicts with livestock.

"The science clearly shows that killing wolves isn't an effective way to prevent future conflicts," said Ressler. "It's disheartening to see how all of this unnecessary killing affects Washington's wolf population. The department needs enforceable rules that require the proper nonlethal techniques, and we'll continue to advocate for that."

## **Background**

Washington's wolves were driven to extinction in the early 1900s by a government-sponsored eradication program on behalf of the livestock industry. With protection from the Endangered Species Act, however, the animals began to return from neighboring Idaho and British Columbia in the early 2000s.

Wolves are currently federally protected in the western two-thirds of Washington and protected everywhere in the state under state law. Over the past eight years, the state has killed 31 endangered wolves. Most killings occur on public lands.

Spurred by the department's lengthy history of slaughtering wolves, as well as years of advocacy by the Center and other [conservation groups](#), Gov. Jay Inslee urged the department in October to dramatically rein in its [wolf](#)-killing. So far, the department has not made any clear policy changes based on this directive.

Provided by Center for Biological Diversity

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