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Washington Wildlife First Calls on State to Disclose Wolf Poaching Incidents
Nonprofit offers \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of wolf killers

Seattle, WA – Washington Wildlife First is calling upon the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to be honest with the public about the extent of wolf poaching in the state. The nonprofit also announced that it is offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of anyone responsible for illegally killing wolves in Washington.

Julia Smith, the Department’s wolf policy lead, confirmed for the first time Wednesday afternoon that the agency is aware of and actively investigating dead wolves in Stevens County, Washington.

Smith’s statement appeared in an article posted Wednesday night in the *Northwest Sportsman*, which indicated the Department was refusing to provide any further details, because the incident is still under investigation.

An [incident report](#) from the Stevens County Sheriff’s Office confirms that two deputies discovered four dead wolves while on snowmobile patrol in the county on February 18, 2022, and immediately reported them to the Department. The report indicates that the deputies never heard back from the Department about the incident.

Rumors have circulated for weeks about widespread poaching in Stevens and Ferry counties, but the Department has either denied any knowledge of the incidents or refused to answer questions about them. These denials have come as the Department proclaims the success of its wolf recovery efforts and tries to fight back any meaningful limits on its authority to use taxpayer funds to kill wolves, under a rule being considered by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission.

“The Department should be honest with the Washington public about what is happening to wolves in our state,” says Washington Wildlife First Executive Director Samantha Bruegger. “The Department has been dodging questions on poaching for months, and sometimes lying outright to the public. The Department continually asks the members of the public to ‘trust’ it, but how can we trust an agency that has been so consistently dishonest with us?”

In contrast to Washington’s attempt to hide these crimes, Oregon authorities have been transparent about wolf poaching incidents in that state, where an entire pack of eight wolves was poisoned in the eastern part of the state in 2021. As a result, nonprofit organizations have offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of anyone responsible.

Washington Wildlife First announced on Thursday that it would offer a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person or people responsible for any wolf poaching in Washington.

“If the Department was transparent about the fact that poaching was also happening in our state, I have no doubt that other organizations would immediately contribute to this reward,” Bruegger said. “We hope that this poaching is being investigated aggressively, and certainly do not want the Department to disclose details that would compromise that investigation. But these wolf deaths were discovered more than three months ago, and state authorities cannot continue to hide the fact that these crimes were committed.”

At a meeting of the Fish and Wildlife Commission earlier this month, Commissioner Melanie Rowland tried to ask Department staff if it was aware of any poaching incidents this year, because she said that information could be significant to the Commission’s consideration of a rule to limit further killing of state endangered wolves. In a sharp exchange, Commission Vice Chairman Molly Linville told Rowland that her questions were “not fair” to Department staff, ordering her to take them “offline,” so that staff would not have to answer them in public.

A member of the state’s Wolf Advisory Group also asked about the rumors of poaching at an April meeting, but Department staff told her that they were not aware of any poaching incidents. On March 14, 2022, the Department published a [monthly wolf report](#) falsely claiming that it had documented no wolf mortalities in 2022. [In its April 11, 2022, monthly report](#), the Department reported that it had found a wolf from the Snookum Pack who had died of natural causes, and the report said this was the only wolf mortality the Department was aware of in 2022. The Department’s [May wolf report](#) echoed that claim. These claims directly conflict with the report from the Stevens County Sheriff, which indicates the Department was made aware of at least four additional wolf deaths back in February.

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Washington Wildlife First is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing about reform, accountability, and transparency within Washington’s environmental agencies, beginning with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.