

OLYM Mountain Goat Management Plan
Final Environmental Impact Statement
FAQs

1. What is this mountain goat management plan (plan/EIS) all about and why is it needed?

The plan's purpose is to allow Olympic National Park to reduce or eliminate the environmental damage done by non-native mountain goats and the public safety risks associated with their presence on the Olympic Peninsula.

2. What is the plan?

The plan is to reach a zero population level of mountain goats in the park and adjacent Olympic National Forest lands through capture and relocation and then lethal removal. Our top priority is capture and relocation; however, once capture operations become impractical or hazardous due to steep terrain the remaining goats would be removed by lethal means.

These activities would remove approximately 90 percent of the projected 2018 mountain goat population, or approximately 625 to 675 mountain goats. The remaining 10 percent would be addressed through ongoing maintenance activities which would involve opportunistic ground- and helicopter-based lethal removal of mountain goats, with a focus on areas near high visitor use and areas where goats are causing resource damage.

3. Who developed the plan?

A team of wildlife biologists and wildlife, forest, and park managers from the National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife developed the plan with assistance from the National Park Service Environmental Quality Division and a contractor (Louis Berger Group). Tribes and approximately 100 individuals and organizations provided feedback that also contributed to development of the plan.

4. Why can't fertility control measures be used?

Fertility control would not be effective due to the extreme difficulty in accessing the animals and the fact there is no approved chemical contraception for mountain goats.

5. Why can't the park just introduce wolves to take care of the goat population?

Reintroduction of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) would be ineffective in meeting the plan/EIS objectives for two reasons. First, wolves are not effective predators on mountain goats. Typically wolves are unable to attack mountain goats because of the terrain they live in. Second, the reintroduction of wolves would have more impact on elk and deer than on goats. The reintroduction of wolves would require extensive planning, public engagement, and cost and would be controversial. It is not something that is likely to occur in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile the goat population continues to grow.

6. Why can't the park use salt blocks for long-term management?

Placing salt blocks strategically to attract mountain goats away from areas of high visitor use or sensitive habitats would not meet the plan/EIS objectives. Mountain goats would continue to impact natural resources and human safety in the park.

7. Why doesn't the park just allow public hunting of the goats?

Hunting is illegal in Olympic National Park and allowing public hunting of goats would require Congressional action to change federal law. Doing so would represent a major change to longstanding policy regarding hunting in national parks.

8. Why isn't there an alternative to increase hunting outside the park?

The majority of the mountain goat population is within the park, where hunting is illegal.

9. Doesn't Olympic National Park already manage mountain goats?

Yes, the 2011 Mountain Goat Action Plan addresses mountain goat behavior in visitor use areas and seeks to minimize potential for hazardous goat-human encounters. While this plan addresses individual mountain goats and their behavior, it does not address mountain goat impacts on natural resources in the park.

10. What is the current population of goats in the Olympic Mountains? How have the numbers changed over time?

The non-native mountain goat population of the Olympic Mountains has more than doubled over the past 12 years, according to a U.S. Geological Survey report released in 2016. The population in 2016 was estimated to be greater than 620 mountain goats. Based on the calculated average annual growth rate of 8% from 2004 to 2011, the current population is estimated at around 725 mountain goats. If this rate of population growth continues, the population would increase by 45% over the next five years.

11. What is the current status of goats in the Cascade Mountains?

In Washington, as in most all jurisdictions with mountain goats, harvest was excessive, and likely the most significant factor leading to population declines. About 20 years ago, management agencies began adopting a more biologically-based approach to goat hunting, resulting in much more conservative limits.

12. How do you know that goats are not native to the Olympic Mountains but are native to the Cascades?

The Olympic Mountains have long been geographically isolated from the Cascade mountain range. Consequently, several mountain-dwelling species that are found in the Cascades were never able to colonize the Olympics—these species include pika, bighorn sheep, ptarmigan, and mountain goats. Historical newspaper stories and other records recount the release of approximately 12 mountain goats to the Olympic Peninsula near Lake Crescent from 1925 to 1929, prior to establishment of the park. An independent review of mountain goat management in Olympic National Park, conducted by the Conservation Biology Institute, concluded “the preponderance of evidence supports the view that the mountain goat has never been native to the Olympic Peninsula” and establishes that the probability is low that mountain goats could have colonized the Peninsula naturally.

13. What kind of impacts do goats cause on the Olympic Peninsula?

Mountain goats threaten visitor safety and damage the unique vegetation of the Olympic

Mountains. Because many of the areas inhabited by mountain goats are popular destinations for park and national forest visitors, there is high potential for mountain goat-human interactions. Mountain goats can be a nuisance along trails and around wilderness campsites where they persistently seek salt and minerals from human urine, packs, and sweat on clothing. They often paw and dig areas on the ground where hikers have urinated or disposed of cooking wastewater. The nature of mountain goat-human interactions can vary widely, from humans observing mountain goats from several hundred meters away across a ridge, mountain goats approaching visitors, hazing events and hazardous interactions such as the October 2010 fatality of a park visitor on a popular hiking trail.

14. Won't mountain goats cause the same problems in the Cascades?

No. Because mountain goats are native to the Cascades Range, the area is more suited to them.

15. Where will goats be released?

There are nine proposed release sites on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest; two release sites on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, and one on land owned by Seattle Public Utilities. These sites are at high elevations and are within areas currently or historically occupied by mountain goats.

16. How did you decide where to release the translocated goats?

Sites selected for release in the North Cascades forests were subject to an extensive analysis that integrated several factors including habitat quality, past history of goat populations, current goat numbers, and connectivity to other goat populations. An interagency interest group consisting of tribal, USFS, WDFW, and other biologists selected the release sites. The group also looked at the logistics of transporting mountain goats, as well as minimizing the short-term impacts to recreationists.

17. What is the purpose of relocating goats to the Cascades?

The objective of translocating mountain goats from the Olympic Peninsula to selected areas within the North Cascades forests is to bolster the native population, particularly in regions where habitat appears adequate but native populations have remained low even after hunting was reduced. The long-term goal is to provide demographic and genetic connectivity, such that the North Cascades forests will support close to the number of goats controlled by its habitat capability.

18. Does this plan mean I can look forward to seeing more mountain goats (or having more hunting opportunities) in the Cascade Mountains?

Over time we anticipate that mountain goat populations in the North Cascades forests will increase, enhancing the natural value of these ecosystems and providing additional opportunities for viewing mountain goats in their native habitats. As local populations increase to the point where they can be sustainably hunted, WDFW anticipates being able to provide additional hunting opportunities.

19. How will capture and release operations impact visitor access and recreation in the park and forests?

Under all action alternatives, there would be the potential for temporarily closing limited areas of the park and national forests during management activities such as capture and release operations or lethal removal. Trails and campgrounds would generally remain open to the public in both backcountry and road-accessed areas as long as it is safe to do so. There would be no parkwide or national forest-wide closures, and all geographically-limited closures would be limited to the two, roughly two-week long periods each year that capture and transport operations take place.

20. What will happen to the carcasses of the goats during lethal removal operations?

Some carcasses will be removed, while others will be left in place. There is no intention to leave rotting carcasses within sight or smell of visitors.