

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

House Committee on Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing Statement
By Ranking Member Collin C. Peterson (D-MN-7)

H.R. 424 - Gray Wolf State Management Act of 2017
July 19, 2017

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak in support of my bill, the Gray Wolf State Management Act of 2017.

In 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan no longer required federal protections based on two main factors. First, gray wolf population numbers in each state remained well above established recovery goals set by the 1992 Recovery Plan for the Eastern Timber Wolf. Second, the wolf management plans established by each state provided for the long-term conservation of a viable wolf population in the region. While under state management from 2011 to 2014, gray wolf populations remained well above recovery goals.

At the end of 2014, a single judge sitting in a Washington, DC courtroom created a big mess by somehow coming to the conclusion that gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan need federal protection. This was done despite the scientific evidence conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that gray wolf populations recovered and thrived.

This judge's decision suddenly put farmers and ranchers throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan in a very difficult situation. Currently, it is illegal for a farmer to shoot a gray wolf that is actively attacking cattle or pets. When attacks occur, my constituents are forced to choose between following the law or protecting their livestock and livelihoods.

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Wyoming went through a similar situation when a judge single-handedly relisted wolves in 2014. In March 2017, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that court decision and wolves are once again under Wyoming state management.

My bill returns management of gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan from the federal government back to the states and doesn't allow for further judicial review. The bill also includes Wyoming to protect the state from further judicial overreach. The courts have created a big enough mess already. But it is important for you to note that my bill does not prevent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from relisting gray wolves in the future.

I would like to submit for the record supportive letters from several organizations and technical documents from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

This is a major problem that requires an immediate solution. The states—not the federal government—are best equipped to manage their gray wolf populations by balancing safety, economic, and species management issues. I urge my colleagues to vote this bill out of committee and I appreciate the committee's time.

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