

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

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Service Proposes to Return Management and Protection of Gray Wolves to State Wildlife Professionals Following Successful Recovery Efforts

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Mexican wolves in Southwest would continue to be protected as endangered subspecies

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to remove the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) from the list of threatened and endangered species. The proposal comes after a comprehensive review confirmed its successful recovery following management actions undertaken by federal, state and local partners following the wolf's listing under the Endangered Species Act over three decades ago. The Service is also proposing to maintain protection and expand recovery efforts for the Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) in the Southwest, where it remains endangered.

Under the proposal, state wildlife management agency professionals would resume responsibility for management and protection of gray wolves in states where wolves occur. The proposed rule is based on the best science available and incorporates new information about the gray wolf's current and historical distribution in the contiguous United States and Mexico. It focuses the protection on the Mexican wolf, the only remaining entity that warrants protection under the Act, by designating the Mexican wolf as an endangered subspecies.

In the Western Great Lakes and Northern Rocky Mountains, the gray wolf has rebounded from the brink of extinction to exceed population targets by as much as 300 percent. Gray wolf populations in the Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct and Western Great Lakes Population Segments were removed from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife in 2011 and 2012.

"From the moment a species requires the protection of the Endangered Species Act, our goal is to work with our partners to address the threats it faces and ensure its recovery," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "An exhaustive review of the latest scientific and taxonomic information shows that we have accomplished that goal with the gray wolf, allowing us to focus our work under the ESA on recovery of the Mexican wolf subspecies in the Southwest."

The Service will open a 90-day comment period on both proposals seeking additional scientific, commercial and technical information from the public and other interested parties. The comment period will commence upon publication of the proposed rules in the Federal Register. Relevant information received during this comment period will be reviewed and addressed in the Service's final determination on these proposals, which will be made in 2014. The Service must receive requests for public hearings, in writing, within 45 days of the publication in the Federal Register. Information on how to provide comments will be made available in the Federal Register notices and on the Service's wolf information page at www.fws.gov/graywolfrecovery062013.html.

The Service's proposal is supported by governors and state wildlife agency leadership in each of the states with current wolf populations, as well as those that will assume responsibility for managing wolves dispersing into their states, such as Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Utah and North Dakota.

"With a solid state conservation and management plan in place for the Northern gray wolf, an experienced wildlife management agency that is committed to wolf recovery, and established populations recovering at an increasing rate, Oregon is ready to take on further responsibility for wolf management in this state," said Roy Elicker, Director of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "We know that there are questions that need to be resolved in moving toward a delisting of the Northern gray wolf under the federal ESA, and we believe the

rulemaking process is an appropriate forum to address these issues. Oregon is supportive of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service publishing a proposed rule to begin this dialogue, and we look forward to participating in the scientific review process."

"The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is firmly committed to the long-term persistence of wolves in Washington," said Miranda Wecker, Chair of the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. "The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission believes the state should be responsible for the management of wolves and supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's consideration of delisting gray wolves under the federal Endangered Species Act. By publishing the proposed rule, the Service ensures this important consideration can take place in an open and public process."

The Service's comprehensive review determined that the current listing for gray wolf, which was developed 35 years ago, erroneously included large geographical areas outside the species' historical range. In addition, the review found that the current gray wolf listing did not reasonably represent the range of the only remaining of the Mexican wolf population in the Southwest.

Gray wolves were extirpated from most of the Lower 48 states by the middle of the 20th century, with the exception of northern Minnesota and Isle Royale in Michigan. Subsequently, wolves from Canada occasionally dispersed south and successfully began recolonizing northwest Montana in 1986. In 1995 and 1996, 66 wolves from southwestern Canada were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho.

In 2002 the Northern Rocky Mountain population exceeded the minimum recovery goals of 300 wolves for a third straight year, and they were successfully delisted in the Northern Rocky Mountains in 2012 and Western Great Lakes in 2011. Today, there are at least 6,100 gray wolves in the contiguous United States, with a current estimate of 1,674 in the Northern Rocky Mountains and 4,432 in the Western Great Lakes.

The number of Mexican wolves continues to increase within the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. During the 2012 annual year-end survey, the Mexican wolf Interagency Field Team counted a minimum of 75 Mexican wolves in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico, an increase over the 2011 minimum population count of 58 wolves known to exist in the wild.

In addition to listing the Mexican wolf as an endangered subspecies, the Service proposes to modify existing regulations governing the nonessential experimental population to allow captive raised wolves to be released throughout the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in the Apache and Gila National Forests east central Arizona and west central New Mexico, and to disperse into the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area in the areas of Arizona and New Mexico located between I 40 and I 10.

Read what supporters of the Service proposal are saying at www.fws.gov/whatpeoplearesaying062013.html

For more information on gray and Mexican wolves, including the proposed rules, visit www.fws.gov/graywolfrecovery062013.html.

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