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Rocky Mountain Wolves Lose Critical Protection

Wyoming Left out of the Mix

(Jackson, WY) Today, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it will remove part of the Northern Rocky gray wolf population from the Endangered Species list. Though wolves once roamed from central Mexico to the Arctic, by the 1930s, gray wolves had virtually disappeared from the area. Wolves were reintroduced into the region in 1995.

According to today's delisting rule, wolves will be removed from federal protection in Idaho and Montana, but not in Wyoming, as Wyoming lacks a science-based management plan that will ensure long-term sustainability of wolf populations. The division of a wolf population according to state lines is not based on science. Additionally, Idaho proposed liberal hunting seasons for wolves and Montana continued to remove wolves at an astonishing rate in 2008.

"This is an attempt to circumvent the protection needed for wolves throughout this region," said Sierra Club representative Melanie Stein. "Removing federal protections for wolves will leave them at the mercy of aggressive state plans that treat wolves as pests rather than a valuable wildlife resource. Releasing yet another flawed delisting rule is simply a last ditch attempt to remove protections for wolves before the Bush administration leaves office."

Wyoming's management plan still includes a shoot-on-sight zone that comprises nearly 90 percent of the state and serves as a barrier to the migration of wolves in the Northern Rockies. While Wyoming's plan is the worst, wolf management plans for all three states call for aggressive removal of wolves and management for minimum wolf population numbers.

"The decision to remove protections for wolves is premature and inappropriate," said Sierra Club representative Melanie Stein. "Protections for wolves were removed last year and a court found significant problems with the plans to manage wolves in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. Little has changed since then and wolf populations could still be slashed by more than half."

These plans could threaten the long-term survival of the gray wolf in the Northern Rockies, especially given the genetic isolation of wolves throughout the recovery area. Aggressive wolf-killing practices, coupled with genetic isolation and plans to institute hunts in Idaho and Montana, could push wolf numbers dangerously low and reverse decades of recovery work.

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The Sierra Club, along with other conservation groups, plans to challenge the wolf delisting decision in court.