



## Questions and Answers

### Proposed Removal of the Gray Wolf - Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Species

#### 1) What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposing to do?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment of gray wolves from the federal list of threatened and endangered species, to remove federal protection for critical habitat for the species in Minnesota and Michigan, and to remove the gray wolf special rules which define the circumstances when gray wolves can be taken in Minnesota. The proposed rule to delist the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes DPS appears in the *Federal Register*.

#### 2) Didn't the Service already delist the wolf in at least part of the United States?

In recent years, the Service has taken several steps to reduce and remove federal protection for gray wolves, but none of those are currently in effect. In 2003 we reduced the federal protective status of wolves from endangered to threatened in two large areas of the country – the Western Distinct Population Segment and the Eastern DPS. In 2004 we proposed to remove Endangered Species Act protection (i.e., delisting) for gray wolves in the Eastern DPS. However, a number of animal welfare and environmental organizations opposed the 2003 change to threatened status and filed suit in two federal district courts. Those courts ruled that our DPS boundaries included more area than was appropriate, and thus our DPSs were not valid and our 2003 reclassifications to threatened status were reversed. Those rulings also had the effect of ending our 2004 proposed delisting of the gray wolf Eastern DPS.

This new (2006) delisting proposal replaces the large 2003 Eastern DPS with a much smaller Western Great Lakes DPS – a DPS that is narrowly structured around the core recovery areas where wolves have exceeded their recovery goals since 1999.

#### 3) What is a Distinct Population Segment?

The ESA allows the listing and delisting of species, subspecies, and distinct population segments of vertebrate animals. A Distinct Population Segment, or DPS, is a significant population that occurs in a distinct portion of a species' or subspecies' range. The DPS is usually described geographically, such as "all members of XYZ species north of 40 degrees north latitude."

The Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment encompasses a core area where wolf recovery has occurred. This core area includes northern and central forested areas of Minnesota and Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The DPS also includes Michigan's Lower Peninsula and portions of adjacent states that are within the range of wolves dispersing from the core area.



### Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment

#### 4) What happens to gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS if they are delisted?

If delisted, the gray wolf would no longer be protected by the Endangered Species Act. The Service would no longer oversee conservation efforts in the DPS. Instead, state and tribal law would dictate the level of gray wolf protection and management. The Service will continue to monitor wolves in the DPS for five years after delisting.

#### 5) What is the status of wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS while the Service considers the proposal? Are they still protected?

Gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS will continue to be protected under the ESA as an endangered species (threatened in Minnesota) while the Service considers final action on the proposed rule. Critical habitat and special rules for wolf management will also remain in place until a final decision on the proposal is made.

#### 6) Why is the Service proposing to delist gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS?

The goal of the ESA is to improve the health of a listed species to the point that it no longer needs the protection of the ESA. Generally, this means reducing or removing threats to its survival, resulting in increasing numbers and distribution of the species.

The approved recovery plan for the gray wolf in the eastern United States sets forth population criteria that, when achieved, will ensure the survival of the gray wolf into the future. Those population criteria are:

- The Minnesota population is at least 1,250 and its continued survival is assured.
- A second population outside of Minnesota and Isle Royale (Michigan) is re-established, having at least 100 wolves in late winter if located within 100 miles of the Minnesota wolf population or having at least 200 wolves if located beyond that distance. A Wisconsin-Michigan population of 100 is considered viable because continued immigration of Minnesota wolves will supplement it.

- These population levels (outside of Minnesota) are maintained for five consecutive years (that is, for six annual wolf surveys).

Gray wolf numbers and distribution in the Western Great Lakes DPS have exceeded the population criteria identified in the recovery plan. Today's estimated population in Minnesota is about 3,020. Wolves became established in Michigan and Wisconsin and now number 405 and 425 in those states, respectively.

In addition to exceeding population criteria set out in the recovery plan, potential threats after delisting have been addressed by Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin state management plans. To prepare for federal delisting, each of those states developed a wolf management plan with the goal of ensuring future survival of the state's wolf population. Those plans were signed by the head of each state's Department of Natural Resources after input from wolf experts and extensive public involvement.

### **7) How do the gray wolf management plans prepared by Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin ensure the long-term survival of gray wolves in those states?**

All three state wolf management plans are designed to maintain minimum wolf populations that exceed the recovery criteria for an isolated wolf population in the federal eastern recovery plan. The state plans implement management actions and protections that will maintain wolf populations above the federal recovery criteria for the foreseeable future.

The Michigan plan calls for a minimum sustainable population of 200 wolves in the Upper Peninsula. Habitat, prey, and land-use analysis showed that the Upper Peninsula can support at least 800 wolves. No upper population limit is specified, but an upper limit referred to as the *cultural carrying capacity* will be determined by public reaction. The plan acknowledges that in the future, "some degree of wolf population stabilization and control" may be needed and that "some wolves will likely need to be killed under controlled conditions." The Michigan DNR plans to revise their wolf management plan. They are in the early stages and have begun to form a group of interested parties. That group will provide the DNR with a recommended management plan.

Under the Minnesota plan, wolves will be allowed to continue to naturally expand their range within the state. The minimum statewide winter population goal is 1,600 wolves; there is no maximum goal. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will take the appropriate actions to remedy the situation if the population falls below the minimum goal. The plan divides the state into wolf management zones A and B, which correspond to zones 1-4 and zone 5, respectively, in the federal wolf recovery plan. In Zone A, where over 80 percent of the wolves reside, state protections would be nearly as strict as current protections under the ESA, and we expect little or no resulting post-delisting population decline there. The protection provided by the plan to the Zone A wolves will ensure a state wolf population well above 1,600 in that zone. In Zone B, wolves could be killed to protect domestic animals, even if attacks or threatening behavior have not occurred. While a significant decrease in the Zone B wolf population may result, such a result would be consistent with the federal recovery plan, which discourages the establishment of a wolf population in that portion of the state.

In Wisconsin, the minimum population management goal is 350 outside of Native American Reservations. Because the wolf population now exceeds this level, the state delisted wolves to Protected Wild Animal status on August 1, 2004. If numbers decline and stay below 250 for three years, the state will relist as threatened. If they decline to less than 80 for one year, the state will relist or reclassify the wolf as

endangered. The Wisconsin management plan is currently under review and the state intends to publish an appendix that contains updates to the original plan. There are no anticipated changes to the management goals.

**8) How will the Service ensure the state management plans are sufficient to protect the future survival of gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS?**

Wolf populations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan will be monitored for a minimum of five years to ensure that delisting has not occurred prematurely. If it appears, at any time, that the gray wolf cannot sustain itself without the protections of the ESA, the Service can initiate the listing process, including emergency listing.

**9) How will wolves be monitored after they are delisted?**

A post-delisting monitoring plan for the gray wolf Western Great Lakes DPS is being developed, focusing on three areas: gray wolf population dynamics, threats to the species, and mechanisms in place to reduce threats. The goal of the plan is to ensure that threats do not arise or increase unexpectedly after delisting. Monitoring would be conducted in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, the core wolf recovery area.

Wolf populations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have been surveyed and studied for several decades, primarily by the three state natural resource departments, but with assistance from many partners, including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey – Biological Resources Division, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services, Tribal natural resource agencies, and the Service. All three states intend to continue their previous wolf population monitoring practices with only minor changes.

In addition to monitoring population numbers and trends, the monitoring plan will include evaluating threats, in particular disease, human-caused mortality, and any legal or management measures imposed by states or tribes.

If at any time during the monitoring period the Service detects a substantial decline in the populations or a new or expanded threat, it will evaluate and change the monitoring methods, if appropriate, and consider relisting the Western Great Lakes DPS. At the end of the monitoring period, the Service will decide if relisting, continued monitoring, or ending Service monitoring is appropriate. If warranted (for example, data show a significant decline or increased threats), the Service will consider continuing monitoring beyond the specified time.

**10) Does this proposal affect wolves outside the Western Great Lakes DPS?**

No, this proposal only affects the ESA status of gray wolves within the Western Great Lakes DPS. Gray wolves throughout the rest of the coterminous U.S. and red wolves (a separate species found in the Southeast), would not be affected by this proposed action.

**11) If gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS are delisted, can they be hunted and trapped?**

Once gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS are delisted, states and tribes will be responsible for their protection and management. Each state or tribe must decide whether activities such as hunting and trapping will be allowed. For example, Minnesota will not consider public hunting and trapping, except for depredation control, until at least five years after federal delisting. In Wisconsin, public harvest would only

be considered if the population exceeds 350 wolves outside of Native American Reservations and would require authorization by the Legislature following major public input. The Michigan management plan acknowledges that the wolf population may need to be controlled by lethal means when the “cultural carrying capacity” is reached or approached, but it does not propose any specific measures to do this.

The Service does not prescribe the specifics of how states and tribes manage delisted wolves, but rather we ensure that they implement management and protective measures that effectively conserve the gray wolves in their states so federal relisting as threatened or endangered will not be necessary.

### **12) When will the Service make a final decision on this proposal?**

In general, the Service has a year from the date a proposal is made to finalize the proposed action. During that time, the Service solicits public input, often holds public hearings, evaluates comments and other information gathered during the public comment period, and makes a decision on the proposal. The Service can approve the proposal, withdraw it, or approve it in amended form based on information gathered during the comment period.

### **13) How can the public provide input on the proposal?**

The Service is accepting comments on the proposal for 90 days after the proposed rule is published in the *Federal Register*. You may comment by sending an e-mail to [WGLwolfdelist@fws.gov](mailto:WGLwolfdelist@fws.gov).

or by sending a letter to:

Western Great Lakes Wolf Delisting  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Whipple Federal Building  
1 Federal Drive  
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

or by sending a fax to 612-713-5292

or by following the instruction on the federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>.

In addition, a series of public hearings will be held where oral and written comments will be accepted. Check the Service’s Midwest website at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/wolf/> for dates and locations of the public hearings.

### **14) Where can I get more information?**

The *Federal Register* publication of the proposed delisting of the gray wolf Western Great Lakes DPS, as well as information about gray wolf populations, is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/wolf>.

Individuals or groups wishing to be placed on the Service’s mailing list to obtain updates on the wolf’s status can write to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Gray Wolf Review

1 Federal Drive  
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

or use the [GRAYWOLFMAIL@FWS.GOV](mailto:GRAYWOLFMAIL@FWS.GOV) address or call the Service's Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337.