

DRAFT - Memorandum of Understanding - DRAFT

Maintenance and Enhancement of Gray Wolf Recovery in the
Northern Rocky Mountains

WHEREAS, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has identified a metapopulation of gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) consisting of three population areas, the Central Idaho Nonessential Experimental Population Area, Northwestern Montana, and the Yellowstone Nonessential Experimental Population Area;

WHEREAS, the recovery standard adopted by the FWS for delisting of the distinct population segment of gray wolves recommended a metapopulation of at least 30 or more breeding pairs and at least 300 or more wolves equitably distributed among the three population areas and states and that no population area remain totally isolated either because of lack of natural connectivity or lack of commitments to implement human-assisted genetic management strategies if necessary;

WHEREAS, the FWS and States desire to maintain and enhance the recovery of the NRM gray wolf metapopulation and promote the genetic connectivity among the three population areas of gray wolves now and into the future;

WHEREAS, as part of the delisting of gray wolves in the NRM, the States each committed in their wolf plans to classify wolves statewide as a big game animal, trophy game, or species in need of management, and to manage their respective state populations for 15 breeding pairs and 150 wolves and maintain at least the minimum number of 10 breeding pairs and at least 100 wolves, and promote the interchange of wolves among the three population areas;

WHEREAS, the FWS and the States have historically cooperated on all matters of gray wolf conservation and management;

WHEREAS, on July 18, 2008 the Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana issued a preliminary injunction of the March 28, 2008, Final Rule removing the Northern Rocky Mountain distinct population segment of gray wolves from the federal list of endangered and threatened species (Delisting Rule) based in part on concerns about an apparent lack of sufficiently documented genetic exchange;

WHEREAS, on September 22, 2008, the FWS requested that the Federal District Court remand the Delisting Rule back to the FWS, and on October 14 the Federal District Court remanded the Delisting Rule back to the FWS;

WHEREAS, the FWS intends to conduct further rulemaking that addresses, among other issues, the Court's concerns about an apparent lack of sufficiently documented genetic exchange;

WHEREAS, the FWS and the States desire to adopt formal protocols to maintain the recovered status of the NRM gray wolf metapopulation and assure gene flow among the three population areas of gray wolves either by natural connectivity or human-assisted techniques, both during the remand period and after publication of a new Delisting Rule, if any;

THEREFORE, in order to maintain and enhance gray wolf recovery and ensure the long-term viability and genetic diversity of gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains, the States and the FWS agree as follows:

1. The States and FWS (and other federal agencies possibly including the National Park Service and USDA Wildlife Services) will coordinate monitoring of wolf populations and cross-boundary packs and will share information. The States and FWS will report the results of their monitoring to the others no less than annually.
2. The States and FWS recognize that genetic diversity within the NRM wolf population is currently high and will jointly collaborate on topics related to preserving genetic diversity and preserving and enhancing connectivity of the three population areas.
3. The States and FWS agree that natural dispersal among the three population areas facilitates maintenance of genetic diversity and if necessary, human-assisted techniques can be used to accomplish the same goal of preserving genetic diversity and preserving or enhancing connectivity.
4. The States and the FWS further agree that the adaptive management principles outlined in the state plans along with careful management of human-caused mortality from agency lethal control and regulation of public harvest will not impede natural dispersal among the population areas.
5. The States, in coordination with the FWS, will jointly assure gene flow among the three population areas of gray wolves by natural or human-assisted techniques.
6. The States, in coordination with the FWS, will establish and maintain a protocol that will address the collection, storage and analysis of genetic samples from the NRM.
7. The States and the FWS will cooperate by coordinating on funding and technical aspects of monitoring the genetic health of the NRM population.

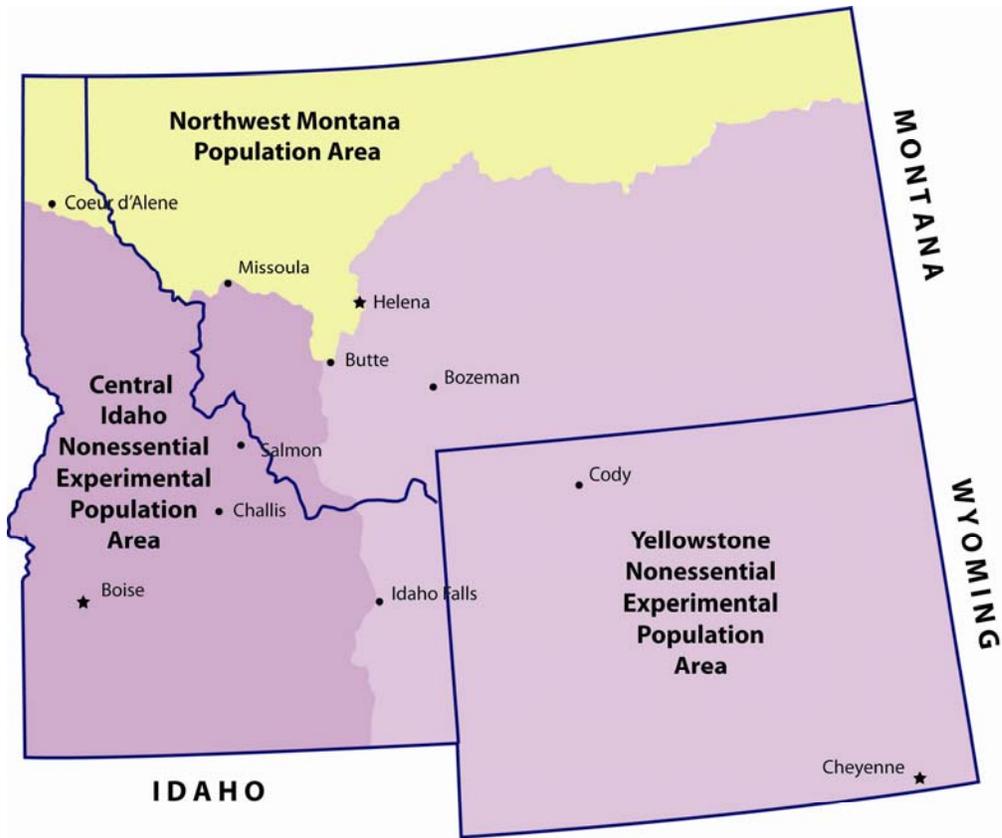
Should human assisted genetic management strategies become necessary we will coordinate by expediting issuance of permits required by law and provide personnel and equipment.

- 8. All signatories recognize that each has statutory responsibilities that cannot be delegated and that this MOU does not and is not considered to abrogate any signatory's statutory responsibilities. This MOU is subject to and is intended to be consistent with all appropriate federal and state laws. This MOU does not obligate any of the undersigned agencies to the expenditure of funds except in accordance with lawful appropriations by the respective agencies. The undersigned agencies will take appropriate steps to seek funding to implement this MOU.

- 9. This MOU will be implemented upon final signature of all parties.

Signed...

Agency: _____ Name/Title: _____ Date: _____



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Figure 1. The three population areas are Northwest Montana Population Area, Central Idaho Nonessential Experimental Population Area, and the Yellowstone Nonessential Experimental Population Area.