

# News Release



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October 4, 2011

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## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Gray Wolf Delisting and Transfer of Gray Wolf Management to the State of Wyoming**

Following approval of a revised wolf management plan by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to remove the gray wolf population in Wyoming from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. Due to recovery efforts and the provisions of the revised state plan, the Wyoming wolf population is healthy and stable, current and future threats to wolves have been addressed, and a post-delisting monitoring and management framework has been developed.

Today's formal proposal follows an agreement with the state of Wyoming that serves as the blueprint for returning wolf management to state control — announced in principle in July and with more detail in [August](#). If this proposal is finalized, the gray wolf would be delisted in Wyoming under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and future management for this species, except in National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges, would be conducted by the appropriate State or tribal wildlife agencies.

“After years of hard work by the Fish and Wildlife Service and our partners to achieve the successful recovery of wolves in the northern Rockies, Wyoming wolves are ready to stand on their own under the management of the professional wildlife biologists of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. “We expect Wyoming’s wolf population will be maintained well above recovery levels under State management, and we have worked with the State to develop a strong post-delisting monitoring and management plan to ensure that this remarkable conservation success endures for future generations.”

The Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population is biologically recovered, with more than 1,650 wolves, 244 packs and over 110 breeding pairs. It has exceeded recovery goals for 11 consecutive years, fully occupies nearly all suitable habitat, and has high levels of genetic diversity.

In August, the Service and the State of Wyoming announced an agreement that served as the basis for a revision to the State's management plan. The points of agreement promote the management of a stable, sustainable population of wolves, and pave the way for the Service to return wolf management to Wyoming. A fact sheet about the agreement and its provisions is available [here](#). The state's revised wolf management plan was approved by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission on September 14, 2011. The revised wolf management plan is available [here](#).

Finalizing this proposal to delist will be dependent on changes to Wyoming statutes and regulations necessary to conform to and implement the wolf management plan. If the statutory or regulatory changes deviate significantly from the approved state wolf management plan, the Service may need to withdraw the delisting proposal or reopen the comment period to provide the public an opportunity to review and comment on that information. Until a final decision on this proposal is published, wolves in Wyoming will remain fully protected under the ESA.

Under the state plan, wolves will continue to be subject to federal management in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, and within the National Elk Refuge. Outside of the parks and refuge, wolves in northwestern Wyoming will be managed as trophy game animals and human-caused mortality (including hunting) will be carefully regulated. Collectively, this area encompasses nearly all of Wyoming's current wolf breeding pairs, the vast majority of the suitable habitat, and is large enough to maintain Wyoming's share of a recovered wolf population in the northern Rocky Mountains.

In addition, the trophy game area will expand from October 15 to the end of February each year. This expanded trophy game area will provide additional protections to wolves to assist natural movement among populations by limiting unregulated wolf killing during mid to late winter when dispersal activity is high.

In 2009, the Service published a final rule to remove ESA protections for wolves across the Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf Distinct Population Segment (DPS), except in Wyoming. Wyoming was excluded from the action because the state's management plan did not provide the necessary regulatory mechanisms to assure that

gray wolf populations would be conserved if the protections of the ESA were removed. This scientifically based rule was later invalidated by the courts following legal challenge, but was reinstated by Congressional direction.

The Service is seeking scientific information and comments from the public about the proposal including the post-delisting monitoring and management framework. Written comments regarding the proposal may be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. [FWS-R6-ES-2011-0039].
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. [FWS-R6-ES-2011-0039]; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received within 100 days, on or before January 13, 2012. The Service will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means the agency will post any personal information provided through the process. The Service is not able to accept email or fax comments.

A peer review panel is scheduled to conduct an assessment of this proposal during the public comment period. Once completed in December, this assessment will be posted online at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/>. Additional background information on gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain region is available on the same site.

All comments and information, including on the assessment, received during the comment period will be considered during the preparation of a final determination. Accordingly, the final decision may differ from this proposal.

For further information, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mountain-Prairie Region Office, Ecological Services Division, 134 Union Blvd., Lakewood, CO 80228; telephone 303-236-7400. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

The Service will hold a public hearing at the Robert A. Peck Arts Center, Central Wyoming College, 2660 Peck Avenue, Riverton, WY 82501 (307-855-2000) from 6:30- 8:30 p.m. on November 15, 2011, to give all interested persons the opportunity to submit comments on the proposal. There will be an informational meeting from 4:30 - 6:00 p.m. at the same location to provide an opportunity for the public asks questions regarding the proposed rule.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit

<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.*

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# Wyoming and U.S. Department of the Interior Wolf Management Agreement Fact Sheet

## **Objective:**

- The Wyoming wolf management plan will promote the management of a stable, sustainable population of wolves.

## **Population Goals:**

- Wyoming agrees to manage for a population of at least 10 breeding pairs and at least 100 wolves outside Yellowstone National Park.
- The wolf populations in Yellowstone and on the lands of sovereign nations will provide the remaining buffer above the minimum recovery goal intended by the management objective of at least 15 breeding pairs and at least 150 wolves statewide.
- The State of Wyoming will monitor the state's wolf population, based on scientifically defensible methods, to document the number of wolves and breeding pairs outside of Yellowstone.

## **Trophy Game Management Area (TGMA):**

- The TGMA will expand from October 15 to February 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> to protect dispersers during peak dispersal periods.
- The TGMA extension will be treated as a flex-line moving from the permanent line to the extension line on October 15<sup>th</sup> and back to the existing TGMA line on March 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Reference to potential Game and Fish Commission diminishment of the TGMA will be removed from Wyoming statute.

## **General Management Inside the TGMA:**

- Wyoming agrees to remove current statutory mandates for aggressive management inside the TGMA.
- Management of wolf depredation on livestock inside the TGMA will continue using all of the techniques currently used under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management.
- Rules governing defense of property taking shall be similar to 50 CFR 17.84(n) regarding experimental population rules, thus allowing producers to take wolves inside the TGMA found in the act of preying on their livestock.
- Taking of wolves on elk feedgrounds inside the TGMA will be limited to wolves impacting elk in said area specifically for the purposes of protecting private stack yards, transmittal of brucellosis, or health and safety related to highways.

- Inside the TGMA, hunting seasons will occur primarily in conjunction with fall hunting seasons. However, they may be established outside of that period or extended beyond that period if necessary to achieve management objectives.
- When considering extending its hunting program Wyoming will develop a hunt plan that will take into consideration, but not limited to the following: wolf breeding seasons; short and long range dispersal opportunity, survival, and success in forming new or joining existing packs; conflicts with livestock; and the broader game management responsibilities related to ungulates and other wildlife.
- Aerial gunning of wolves inside the TGMA directed by Wyoming Game and Fish Department will be allowed to control livestock depredations, to achieve ungulate management objectives if wolves are determined to be a significant cause for not meeting those objectives, or to address human safety issues. However, other Game and Fish directed aerial gunning for routine wolf population maintenance inside the TGMA is prohibited.
- The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission will divide the TGMA into smaller wolf hunt areas than are described in Wyoming's 2008 wolf management plan.
- The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission will include a statement of management intentions in the revised wolf plan. The statement will address the primary timing of hunting seasons and a description of considerations used for establishing or extending seasons outside the primary period.
- While the seasonal expansion area is in TGMA status, this area will be managed to facilitate natural dispersal.
- Consistent with occupancy during periods of Endangered Species Act protection, neither party expects the seasonally expanded portion of the TGMA to maintain any wolf packs long-term.

### **General Management Outside the TGMA**

- All Wyoming wolves outside the TGMA will be managed as predatory animals.

### **Statutory and Regulatory Changes**

- Wyoming agrees statutory and regulatory changes will be required to implement this agreement and intends to pursue these as necessary to allow implementation of the revised Wyoming wolf management plan to be developed in consideration of the above framework.