

Alexander Archipelago Wolf 90-Day Finding

Questions & Answers

1. What is the Service announcing?

The Service is announcing a 90-day finding on a petition to list the Alexander Archipelago wolf as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Based on its review, the Service finds that the petition, dated August 10, 2011, presents substantial information indicating that listing this species may be warranted and that further evaluation via a status review is needed. The Service is opening a 60-day comment period to collect the best available scientific and commercial information, which will assist in that future status review.

2. What are the next steps/timeline?

The Service will not initiate a status review until funding becomes available. We will announce the commencement of the status review at that time. Based on the results of the status review, the Service will issue a 12-month finding on the petition, which will address whether the Alexander Archipelago wolf should be listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. If we determine that listing the Alexander Archipelago wolf is warranted, we may propose critical habitat at the same time we propose listing or subsequent to listing.

3. What information does the Service have on the Alexander Archipelago wolf population and population trends?

The Alexander Archipelago wolf's population size is uncertain, but was estimated at approximately 900 animals in the fall of 1994. Prince of Wales Island was estimated to support approximately 250 to 350 wolves. Population trends are largely unknown for most of the wolf's range, but the population may have declined on Prince of Wales Island in recent years.

4. Why did the Service find that listing may be warranted and that further evaluation via a status review was needed?

Information presented in the petition and available in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service files indicates that past timber harvest has reduced habitat quality and availability for wolves and Sitka black-tailed deer, their primary prey, in portions of Southeast Alaska. Forest succession and continued logging appear likely to result in additional habitat declines. Based on our understanding of deer biology and forest succession in Southeast Alaska, declines in deer carrying capacity due to loss of year-round habitat and especially winter habitat may be significant threats to wolves in some areas. In addition, the combined effects of legal and illegal trapping and hunting mortality may be causing wolf population declines in some areas.

5. What percentage of the Alexander Archipelago wolf's range is on public lands?

Within Alaska, approximately 90 percent of the Alexander Archipelago wolf's range is on Federal public lands. Most of this is Tongass National Forest, managed by the U.S. Forest Service, with smaller areas such as Glacier Bay National Park, managed by the National Park Service.

6. What prospects for future development might impact the wolf's habitat?

The primary impacts to wolf habitat appear to be logging and road construction. Logging is a concern because it reduces deer habitat. Conversion of old forests to dense second growth reduces forage for deer and reduces the ability of the forest stands to intercept snow during winter. With reductions in deer populations, wolf populations are expected to decline. Where roads are constructed to facilitate logging, wolf harvests by trappers and hunters typically increases. When annual harvests exceed approximately 30 percent of a wolf population, we expect the population to decline.