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Interior Announces Next Steps in Protection, Recovery, and Scientific Management of Wolves

Washington, DC – The Department of the Interior’s U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that it is proposing to delist biologically recovered gray wolf populations in the Western Great Lakes, and – in accordance with recently enacted legislation – reinstating the Service’s 2009 decision to delist biologically recovered gray wolf populations in the Northern Rocky Mountains.

“Like other iconic species such as the whooping crane, the brown pelican, and the bald eagle, the recovery of the gray wolf is another success story of the Endangered Species Act,” said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. “The gray wolf’s biological recovery reflects years of work by scientists, wildlife managers, and our state, tribal, and stakeholder partners to bring wolf populations back to healthy levels.”

Gray wolves were originally listed as subspecies or as regional populations of subspecies in the lower 48 states and Mexico under the ESA and its predecessor statutes. In 1978, the Service reclassified the gray wolf as an endangered species across all of the lower 48 states and Mexico, except in Minnesota where the gray wolf was classified as threatened.

Gray Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains

As part of today’s actions, the Service is publishing a final rule – as directed by legislative language in the recently enacted Fiscal Year 2011 appropriations bill – reinstating the terms of a 2009 rule removing gray wolves in a portion of the Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment (DPS) encompassing Idaho, Montana and parts of Oregon, Washington and Utah from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. Gray wolves will remain listed under the ESA in Wyoming, although the Service is working closely with that state to develop a wolf management plan that would allow wolves in Wyoming to be removed from the list in the future.

The Service and the states will monitor wolf populations in the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS and gather population data for at least five years under a post-delisting monitoring plan previously

approved by the Service.

“We are implementing the recent legislation that directs the delisting of the gray wolf in most of the Northern Rocky Mountains,” said Interior Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes. “As with other delisted species, we will be applying the Endangered Species Act’s post-delisting monitoring requirements to ensure that wolf populations remain robust, while under state wildlife management.”

Gray Wolves in the Western Great Lakes

The Service is also publishing a proposed rule to remove gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes area — which includes Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin, and portions of adjoining states — from the list of endangered and threatened species because wolves have recovered in this area and no longer require the protection of the ESA.

“Gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes are recovered and no longer warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act,” said Acting Service Director Rowan Gould. “Under this proposed rule, which takes into account the latest taxonomic information about the species, we will return management of gray wolves in the Great Lakes to state wildlife professionals. We are confident that wolves will continue to thrive under the approved state management plans.”

As part of the proposed rule, the Service would revise the range of the gray wolf (the species *Canis lupus*) by removing all or parts of 29 eastern states due to newer taxonomic information indicating that the gray wolf did not historically occur in those states. The Service is also initiating status reviews of gray wolves in the Pacific Northwest and Southwest to determine the appropriate entity and listing status of that entity in those areas, as well as seeking information on a newly-recognized species, the eastern wolf (*Canis lycaon*), throughout its range in the United States and Canada. The Service is seeking public comment as part of this process.

The proposed rule to remove wolves in the Western Great Lakes from the ESA, as well as the final rule reinstating the 2009 final delisting rule for the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS as directed by the 2011 Full-Year Appropriations Act will publish in the *Federal Register* on May 5, 2011. The final rule for wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS will be effective immediately upon publication.

Written comments on the proposed rule for wolves in the Western Great Lakes 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-R3-ES-2011-0029].
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. [FWS-R3-ES-2011-0029]; 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 60 days, on or before July 5, 2011. 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 faxes.

Public hearings for the proposed removal of wolves in the Western Great Lakes and proposed removal

of eastern states from the gray wolf listing will be held May 18 in Ashland, Wisconsin, and on June 8 in Augusta, Maine. More information on the hearings will be available at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/wolf/> or by calling 612-713-5350.

Following the close of the comment period, the Service will consider all new information and other data and make a final decision on the proposal to remove the Western Great Lakes DPS of wolves from the ESA and revise the range of the gray wolf in the eastern U.S. In the meantime, gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes area will remain classified as endangered, except in Minnesota where they will remain threatened. Gray wolves will also remain classified as endangered in the western U.S., except where delisted in the Northern Rocky Mountains DPS in accordance with Congressional action and where found in experimental populations, until status reviews and rulemaking processes are completed.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. The Service 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. The Service is 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. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. For more information on the Service's work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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