



## Questions and Answers

### Final Rule to Remove the Gray Wolf - Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Species

#### 1) What does this final rule do for wolves?

This final rule removes the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of gray wolves from the federal list of threatened and endangered species; removes federal protection for critical habitat for the species in Minnesota and Michigan; and removes the special rules that placed federal restrictions on the taking of gray wolves in Minnesota.

We have reviewed and analyzed all comments and data that we received during the 90-day public comment period following Federal Register publication of the proposed rule in March 2006 and have made a final decision to delist the Gray Wolf Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment. A map of the Distinct Population Area is shown in the answer for question 4), below.

#### 2) How does this action affect wolves in the northeast, or elsewhere outside the Western Great Lakes DPS boundary?

The status of wolves outside the DPS boundary is not changed by this action.

#### 3) Why are northeastern states excluded from the action?

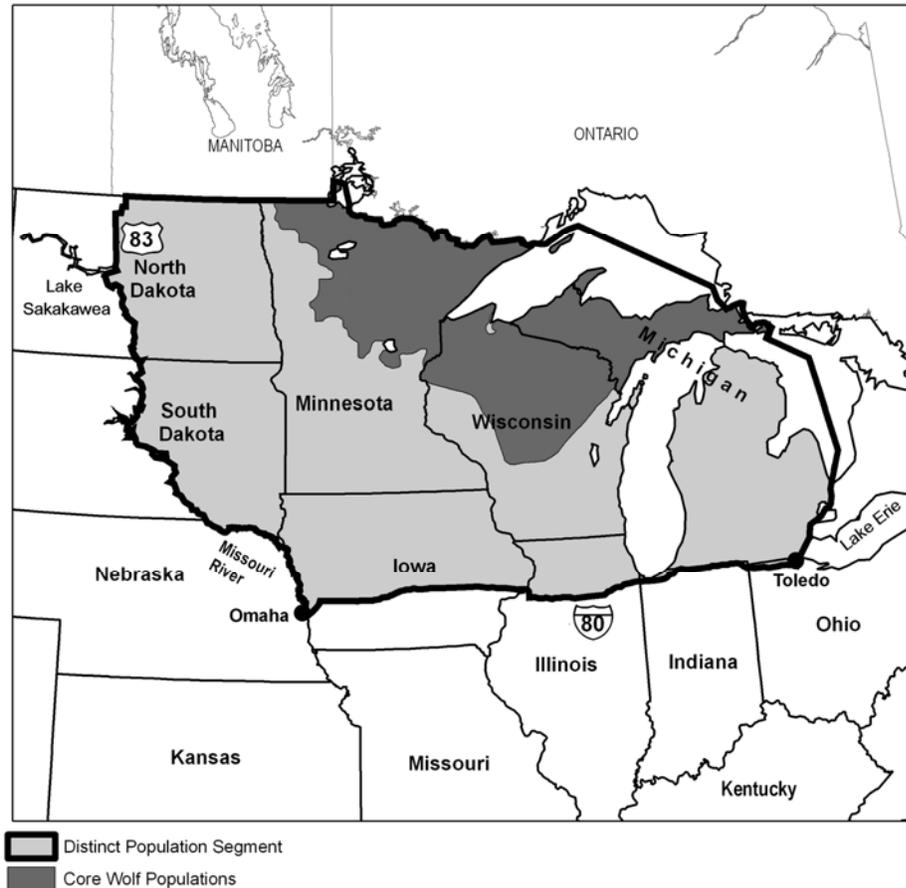
In 2003 the Service established distinct population segments for gray wolves in three large areas of the country—the Western Distinct Population Segment, the Eastern DPS, and the Southwestern DPS—and downlisted wolves in Western and Eastern segments to threatened status. In 2004 we proposed to remove Endangered Species Act protection (i.e., delisting) for gray wolves in the Eastern DPS. However, a number of animal welfare and environmental organizations filed suit in two federal district courts in which they challenged the 2003 DPSs. Those courts ruled that our DPS boundaries included more area than was appropriate, and thus our DPSs were not valid and the delisting proposal for the Eastern DPS had to be withdrawn. In 2006, the Service proposed establishing and delisting the smaller western Great Lakes DPS that includes the wolf populations in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin.

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

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

The Western Great Lakes DPS 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.

## Gray Wolf - Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment



### 5) Why did the Service delist gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS?

We delisted the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes DPS because that DPS supports a healthy self-sustaining population of wolves. In the past, human-caused mortality resulted in the near extinction of gray wolves in the conterminous U.S. With state management plans in place, each of the states will now manage wolf populations in accordance with population objectives, which will ensure survival of the species in the DPS into the foreseeable future.

The goal of the Endangered Species Act is to improve the status of a listed species to the point that it no longer needs ESA protection. 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 434 and 465 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.

### **6) How will gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS be managed now that they are delisted?**

Gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment are no longer protected by the Endangered Species Act. Instead, state and tribal laws dictate the level of gray wolf protection and management. Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan developed wolf management plans in preparation for the delisting. Those plans now take effect.

In the portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio that are within the Western Great Lakes DPS, wolves are protected by state and tribal law. The following is the state regulatory designation or status of gray wolves **in the portions of those states within the DPS**:

North Dakota – furbearer, with closed season  
 South Dakota – protected wildlife, no season  
 Iowa – furbearer, closed season  
 Illinois – threatened  
 Indiana – extirpated  
 Ohio – extirpated

In the portions of these states outside the boundaries of the DPS, the gray wolf remains endangered and protected under the Endangered Species Act. For more information, please contact the appropriate state natural resource agency about how wolves are protected and managed.

Even though the ESA no longer protects gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS, the law requires the Service to monitor wolves in the DPS for five years after delisting. If wolves within the DPS later become endangered or threatened under the ESA, they could be re-listed.

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

The state plans implement management actions and protections that will maintain wolf populations above the federal recovery criteria for the foreseeable future. All three state wolf management plans are designed to maintain minimum wolf populations that exceed the recovery criteria identified in the federal Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Plan for an “isolated wolf population.”

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 is in the process of revising its wolf management plan. The DNR’s goal remains to ensure the wolf population remains viable and above a level that would require either federal or state reclassification as a threatened or endangered species. Based on the wolf management guidelines developed by the Michigan Wolf Management Roundtable--currently being used by the Michigan DNR in revising its wolf management plan--both the current (1997) Michigan plan and the revised plan will provide adequate protection and management for wolves in the Upper Peninsula.

Under the Minnesota plan, wolves will be allowed to continue to naturally expand their range within the state. The statewide winter population goal is a minimum of 1,600 wolves; there is no maximum goal. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will take 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 Eastern Timber 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.

The Wisconsin wolf management plan, finalized in 1999 and updated in 2006, has a goal of 350 wolves 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 only significant changes resulting from the 2006 plan update are an expansion of the allowable trapping area to one mile (from one-half mile) around verified depredation sites in Zones 1 and 2, and the elimination of automatic habitat protection requirements for all rendezvous sites. Den sites remain protected, other depredation control practices are unchanged, and the wolf management goal remains at 350 wolves outside reservations.

#### **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) Can gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes DPS now be hunted and trapped?**

States and tribes are responsible for gray wolf protection and management now that the western Great Lakes DPS is delisted. 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.

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

The *Federal Register* publication of the Final Rule to delist 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> or can be obtained by writing to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Gray Wolf  
1 Federal Drive  
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056