



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wolf Tracks

A Summary of Gray Wolf Activities and Issues

December, 1999

Introduction

This is the third issue of “Wolf Tracks”, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s update on gray wolf issues. Since the last issue of “Wolf Tracks” was sent, some changes have occurred to our review of protection for gray wolves under the Endangered Species Act. After reading this issue, if you have specific questions or know of someone who would like to receive “Wolf Tracks”, please contact our Gray Wolf Line at 612-713-7337 or at graywolfmail@fws.gov. Wolf Tracks is also available on the Web at midwest.fws.gov/wolf.

New Reclassification Options Being Considered

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering new options for reclassifying and delisting the gray wolf. Previously, we were preparing a proposal to delist (that is, remove from Federal protection) the wolf population in the western Great Lakes States – Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, as well as wolves dispersing westward into North and South Dakota. An important part of this approach was that Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan would develop state management plans that would protect the existence of wolves if they are Federally delisted. State management plans are not required by the Endangered Species Act before a species can be delisted, but these plans would give the Service strong assurances that the wolf would not likely become re-endangered in this part of its range in the foreseeable future.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has a wolf management plan that was approved in 1997, and the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board recently approved the plan for their state. However, the 1999 session of the Minnesota legislature failed to agree on a wolf management plan for Minnesota. Because of this, we are hesitant to propose delisting the western Great Lakes wolf population. Without an approved management plan for Minnesota, the state containing the Midwest’s core wolf population, the Service cannot be assured this animal will continue to do well and it is difficult for us to evaluate the future threats to wolves if Federal protection is removed. Therefore, in the absence of a state management plan for Minnesota, we are considering keeping the current classification of threatened for Minnesota wolves and reclassifying wolves from endangered to threatened in Michigan and Wisconsin, and possibly North and South Dakota. Such a proposal would retain Federal protection for



wolves throughout the Midwest, but would provide Wisconsin and Michigan with additional flexibility to deal with the growing problem of wolves preying on domestic animals.

Yellowstone Litigation Update

In December 1994, the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, and several other groups represented by the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (now called Earth-Justice), the Urbigikits, and the American Farm Bureau Federation, represented by the Mountain States Legal Foundation, went to court to present their cases regarding the reintroduction of wolves into the Yellowstone National Park area. The District Court of Wyoming allowed wolves to be released in January 1995. However, in December 1997 that same court ruled that the experimental rules were illegal.

On July 29, 1999, a Federal appeals court heard arguments in the case which could determine the fate of the wolves in the Greater Yellowstone area. A ruling is expected in two to six months.

Mexican Wolf Litigation Update

On October 29, the U.S. District Court for New Mexico issued its judgement on the lawsuit brought by the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, et al. The Association opposed the reintroduction of the Mexican wolf to the Blue Range Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico. The Court agreed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on all substantive issues, finding that the decision to reintroduce Mexican wolves was made in full compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Administrative Procedures Act. Reintroductions will continue.

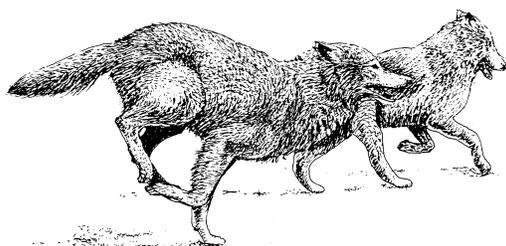
Public Attitudes toward the Wolf in Minnesota

The results of a study conducted by Yale University professor Stephen Kellert on public knowledge, attitudes and behavior toward the wolf in Minnesota were released in June. The study looked at the perspectives of farmers (primarily livestock producers), residents of northern Minnesota wolf range and residents of other areas of the state. The results could help the state of Minnesota determine how best to manage the wolf if it is taken off the Federal list of endangered and threatened species. Some of the key findings include the following:

- The majority of people stated that the most important reason for having wolves in Minnesota is for the enjoyment of future generations. A large proportion of the public also consider the ecological importance of wolves, the value of scientific study, aesthetic quality and the moral rights of the animal as important reasons for having wolves in the state.
- More than half of the respondents say they would not be

afraid to live near wolves.

- Most people believe that livestock owners should be compensated for the loss of their animals to wolves.
- The majority of livestock owners support the public shooting or trapping of wolves as a control option, but, most other respondents fear that the legal hunting and trapping of wolves would result in the animal becoming rare in Minnesota.
- Most of the general public believe that seeing or hearing a wolf in the wild would be one of the greatest outdoor experiences of their life. Despite this interest, most would not be willing to hike many miles to see or hear a wolf in the wild.
- Only a minority feel that the wolf will be an impediment to economic and social development in the state.
- Most respondents feel that habitat necessary for the survival of the wolf in Minnesota should be protected.
- Promoting tourism is the favored method of increasing the economic importance of wolves. Nearly half of the livestock owners and a small portion of the general public favor sport hunting and trapping of wolves to increase their economic importance.
- Most respondents prefer that the state, not the Federal government, have the responsibility for managing wolves in Minnesota. Also, a substantial majority feel that the Minnesota DNR would do a good job managing the wolf in the state.
- Affection toward, and interest in, wolves appears to have increased since a similar study was conducted in 1985. Additionally, opposition toward hunting wolves and support for controlling wolf damage to livestock has increased since that time.



Mexican Gray Wolf Update

Since March 29, 1998, 34 Mexican gray wolves have been released from captive breeding facilities into the wild in the southwestern United States. Of these, 22 currently remain free-ranging. These 22 wolves comprise 5 packs: the Campbell Blue pack (currently just 1 adult male), the Hawk's Nest pack (2 adults and 3 pups), the Gavilan pack (2 adults and 1 yearling and 5 pups), the Mule pack (2 adults and 4 pups) and the Pipestem pack (1 adult and 1 pup).

The alpha male, a yearling and five pups of the Pipestem pack were recaptured after two confirmed depredations on livestock.

Mexican Gray Wolf Update (continued)

Three of the pups died from parvo virus while in captivity. Attempts are being made to capture the remaining pack members to relocate them. The female of the Campbell Blue pair was found dead on October 27. Preliminary investigation into the cause of death indicates a suspected bite wound to the neck from a cougar. The rest of the packs are being closely observed and seem to be doing well.

This reintroduced population of wolves, like those in central Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone Area, has been designated as a nonessential experimental population and can be legally killed by ranchers if the wolves are attacking livestock on private land. Other provisions of that special rule give agency managers flexibility to address wolf-human conflicts. Compensation will be paid by Defenders of Wildlife, a private conservation organization, to owners whose livestock are killed by these wolves.

Current Population Numbers (1998/99 Censuses)

Western Great Lakes gray wolf:	
Michigan:	
Upper Peninsula	174
Isle Royale	25
Minnesota (1997-98 data):	2450
Wisconsin:	197
Rocky Mountain gray wolf:	
Northwest Montana:	80
Central Idaho:	170
Yellowstone:	170
Mexican gray wolf:	22

Endangered Species Act Definitions

- Endangered: Any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.
- Threatened: Any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

The Endangered Species Act recognizes that “threatened” species may need somewhat different protections than “endangered” species. Therefore, special rules can be developed for threatened species which allow greater flexibility in management, as long as the increased flexibility will promote the conservation of the species. This special rule process is authorized under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act. It is this type of special rule that spells out the conditions under which threatened Minnesota wolves that prey on domestic animals may be controlled using lethal means.

Little-Known But Important Features of the Endangered Species Act

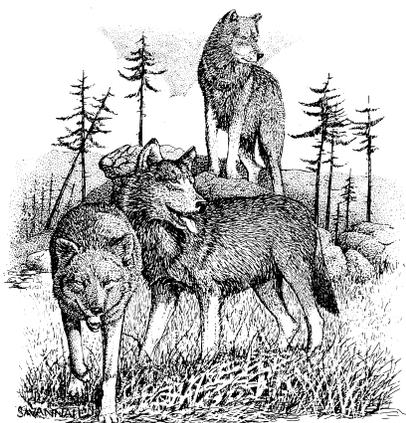
There are features built into the Endangered Species Act and its implementing regulations that give the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service flexibility in listing, protecting, managing and recovering species that need the Act's protections. These three aspects of the Endangered Species Act all can promote the recovery of declining species by fine-tuning the protections of the Act. This fine-tuning minimizes adverse impacts on people and society while maximizing the likelihood of eventual recovery and delisting of the species. Thus, humans and rare species both benefit from their careful use. Despite the fact that the Service commonly uses these features, they are not well understood by the general public. All three of these features are or may be used in gray wolf recovery efforts.

Distinct Population Segments

In addition to the listing and delisting of species and subspecies, the Endangered Species Act allows the listing/delisting of distinct population segments of vertebrate species (i.e. animals with backbones). A Distinct Population Segment is part of a species' or subspecies' population or range that is described geographically instead of biologically. For example, a Distinct Population Segment may be described as "all members of XYZ species that occur north of 40 degrees north latitude."

The use of Distinct Population Segments may have advantages for the protection and conservation of some listed species because the Service can then customize application of the Act across the species' range. We can propose to reclassify (from endangered to threatened) the Distinct Population Segments of species that have improving populations, while retaining "endangered" status for other Distinct Population Segments that are not recovering as fast. By doing this, we remove or reduce the Act's protections from part of the species' range while keeping full Endangered Species Act protection for the Population Segments that need it to continue recovery.

The Service's policy for designating Distinct Population Segments is sometimes called the Vertebrate Population Policy. This policy includes the requirement that if a portion of a species' range is to be designated as "Distinct" that portion of the range must be "discrete and significant." This policy was published in the Federal Register (61 FR 4722-4725; February 7, 1996) and can be found on the Web at: <http://www.fws.gov/r9endspp/pol005.html>.



Section 4(d) Special Rules

Section 4(d) of the Act allows the Service to establish special regulations for threatened (not endangered) species, subspecies, and Distinct Population Segments. These "4(d) rules" take the place of the normal protections of the Act, and may either increase or decrease the Act's normal protections. The Act specifies that 4(d) rules must be "necessary and advisable to provide for the conservation of such species."

Special Features (continued)

One use of 4(d) rules is to relax the normal Endangered Species Act restrictions to reduce conflicts between people and the protections provided to the threatened species. A 4(d) rule can be used in such a situation if those conflicts would adversely affect recovery and if the reduced protection will not slow species' recovery. This type of 4(d) rule already is in effect for gray wolves in Minnesota. Under authority of a 4(d) rule, Minnesota wolves that prey on domestic animals can be trapped and killed by designated government agents. This 4(d) rule was developed to avoid even larger numbers of wolves being killed by private citizens who might otherwise take wolf control into their own hands and illegally kill even greater numbers of wolves. (For more details on this example of a section 4(d) special rule refer to Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations 17.40(d).)

Experimental Populations

Re-establishing a threatened or endangered species in areas of its former range is often necessary for its recovery. However, residents and businesses frequently oppose such reintroductions because they fear that the presence of the species will also bring severe restrictions on the use of private and public land. To overcome this serious obstacle to species reintroductions, Congress added the concept of experimental populations to the Act. Experimental population designations are sometimes referred to as section 10(j) rules.

An experimental population is a geographically-described group of reintroduced plants or animals that is isolated from other existing populations of the species. Members of the experimental population are considered threatened under the Act, and thus, can have special regulations written for them. In addition, if the experimental population is determined to be "nonessential" to the survival of the species, for some activities the experimental population is treated like a species that is proposed for listing as threatened or endangered. In other words, the nonessential experimental population is not given the full protections of the Endangered Species Act.

Three non-essential, experimental populations of wolves currently exist—the Yellowstone Management Area (in Wyoming and portions of Idaho and Montana), the Central Idaho Area (in portions of Idaho and Montana) and the Mexican Wolf Recovery Area (in Arizona and New Mexico).

Feasibility Study on the Reintroduction of Wolves to the Olympic Peninsula

Gray wolves were native to the Olympic Peninsula region of Washington state. However, early settlers extirpated them from the area by heavy hunting, trapping and poisoning. No wolves have been documented on the peninsula since 1920. Since 1935, scientists and other individuals and organizations have suggested reintroducing wolves to the Olympic Peninsula. Recently, there has been a heightened interest in a reintroduction effort, sparked by the involvement of U.S. Representative Norm

Dicks from Washington. In 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded a grant to researchers at the University of Idaho to conduct a study on the feasibility of reintroducing wolves to the Peninsula. The goal was to evaluate the availability of suitable wolf habitat and prey and the biological and socio-economic impacts of reintroduced wolves in the Olympic Peninsula.



The study found that there is adequate habitat and prey in the Olympic National Park and the adjacent Olympic National Forest to support a population of about 56 wolves (six to seven packs). It is expected that black-tailed deer and Roosevelt elk will be the wolves' primary prey. If wolves are reintroduced to the area, the population of black-tailed deer is expected to decline by 13 to 16 percent and the elk populations by 16 to 17 percent, amounts which are not likely to put these animals in jeopardy. There is some concern regarding the population trends of Roosevelt elk on lands outside of the Olympic National Park. While numbers have remained stable within the Park, outside of the Park numbers have been declining. The seasonal movements and occasional range expansion by dispersing wolves may impact these elk populations outside the Park. Although these impacts are expected to be minor, they may be significant to small elk herds.

The social and economic impacts of reintroducing wolves into the park are expected to be minimal. There are few farms with livestock in the area that is most suitable for wolves. Therefore, only occasional losses of livestock are expected. Another concern is that deer and elk hunting on the outskirts of the Park will be reduced because there would be fewer deer and elk.

Despite the progress that has been made, there is no guarantee that a reintroduction will occur. This study is just a first step in the long process of determining if reintroduced wolves can live in the Olympic Peninsula. More biological information is needed before any project can proceed. Basic data on the black-tailed deer and elk populations in the Park and surrounding area are lacking, and information on the effects of wolves on cougar populations and cougar predation is needed. More in-depth studies on the social and economic feasibility of such a reintroduction project also need to be conducted.

For more information on the Olympic Peninsula feasibility study, see the web site at www.r1.fws.gov/text/wolves.html or call Bobbi Barrera at (306)753-6048.

Methods for Minnesota Wolf Census

The most recent census of wolf numbers in Minnesota was conducted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources during the winter of 1997-'98. The results and methods of this census were recently made available.

Methods for Minnesota Wolf Census (continued)

In October of 1997, census instructions and data sheets were sent to the field stations of eight natural resource agencies and to all county land departments, wood industries, Indian Reservations, and Treaty Authorities located in the northern two-thirds of Minnesota. The stations were asked to map all observations of wolves, wolf tracks and wolf scat. Additionally, all participants were asked to provide a subjective report of the number of wolves in their area and to indicate if this number has changed in the last five years. Other sources of information, including data from the 1997 scent station survey, depredation trapping and five ongoing wolf telemetry studies, were used to supplement information supplied by the field stations.

In total, wolf observation data was received from 179 field stations with a total number of 3,451 observations of wolves or wolf sign (scat or tracks). This information was used to estimate the current wolf population and range in Minnesota. The resulting population estimate is 2,450 wolves in 385 packs occupying a range of 73,920 square kilometers (45,830 square miles). This represents a population increase of 50 percent from the 1988-'89 census and a range increase of 45 percent since that same time.

Wolf-Dog Hybrids

Although wolf-dog hybrids have made loving pets for some people, the Service does not recommend the private ownership of wolf-dog hybrids. Because of their relationship with domestic dogs, many people believe that wolf-dog hybrids would make good pets, only to find out later that an adult wolf takes too much of their resources. Many of these animals are then either put to sleep or released into the wild. In some cases, the owner may be willing to keep the animal, but it escapes. If the animal is released or escapes into the wild, it may prey on livestock and kill pet dogs. This has a negative impact on the recovery program for the wolf because it appears that wild wolves are causing the depredation. The negative feelings that some people have for wolves can be reinforced through these incidents. Additionally, it is possible that escaped/released wolf-dog hybrids may mate with wild wolves, thereby passing dog genes into the wild wolf population.

Several states have outlawed the possession of wolf-dog hybrids as pets, and most other states require special permits and regulations for keeping wolf-dog hybrids. Some states will allow the possession of wolf-dog hybrids which have been spayed or neutered but will not allow any new hybrids to be brought into the state. Additionally, since there is no approved rabies vaccine for wolves, wolf-dog hybrids which bite a person are usually killed in order to determine if the animal is infected with the rabies virus. The possession of wolf hybrids for research and education is allowed in most states.

Addendum In the May issue of Wolf Tracks we failed to mention that Peggy Strusacker, a student at Antioch New England Graduate School, is primarily responsible for adapting the Yellowstone WOLF5 predator-prey model to evaluate the effect that wolf restoration in Maine would have on native populations of white-tailed deer, moose and possibly, coyotes.

TATE\GRWOPRODUCTS\WolfTracks\trax3.dr2
December 15, 1999



OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
BISHOP HENRY WHIPPLE FEDERAL BUILDING
1 FEDERAL DRIVE
FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA 55111



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, MN 55111
www.fws.gov/r3pao/wolf
612/713-7337

December 1999