

MEMO TO FILE

From: Scott Becker, Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Coordinator

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Subject: Review of Wyoming Game and Fish Department 2018 Wolf Hunting Regulations

In 2012, gray wolves were delisted in Wyoming; however, on September 24, 2014, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia vacated the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) 2012 delisting rule and reinstated the Service's April 2, 2009 final rule to govern management of gray wolves in Wyoming pursuant to the Endangered Species Act. On December 1, 2014, the Department of Justice, on behalf of the Service, appealed the District Court's decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. On March 3, 2017, the U.S. Court of Appeals, in a unanimous opinion, reversed the ruling of the U.S. District Court and on April 25, 2017 issued a final mandate reversing the vacatur of the 2012 final rule for wolves in Wyoming reverting management of wolves back to state, tribal, or other federal agency authority. The Service 2012 gray wolf delisting rule for Wyoming stated that the Service would initiate a status review and analysis of threats if changes in State law or management regulations posed a significant threat to the Wyoming wolf population; however, the determination of whether to conduct a review or not will be assessed annually (Cooley 2012). On February 22, 2013, the Service determined that changes to State law allowing the use of silencers to hunt wildlife species classified as trophy game animals did not pose a significant threat to the Wyoming wolf population (Jimenez 2013).

In July 2018, the Wyoming Game and Fish (WGFD) Commission adopted Chapter 47 regulations to guide the 2018 gray wolf hunting season in Wyoming. This memo represents an "on-the-spot" assessment of the 2018 wolf hunting regulations which included several changes from the previous season:

- Increased total Wolf Trophy Game Management Area (WTGMA) harvest limits from 44 in 2017 to 58 in 2018.
- In 2018, harvest limits were combined for hunt areas 6 and 7 as well as hunt areas 8, 9, and 11 because packs that utilize these hunt areas regularly cross back and forth across hunt area boundaries.
- Increased hunting season length by one (1) month in all hunt areas with the exception of hunt area 12 (seasonal WTGMA). In 2017, seasons were open from October 1 – December 31 (or sooner if the harvest limit was reached for a particular hunt area) whereas in 2018, seasons were open from September 1 – December 31 (or sooner if the harvest limit was reached for a particular hunt area). This change was enacted to provide hunters with more opportunity to coincide with the increased statewide harvest limits.
- Two new hunt areas, hunt area 13 (Whiskey Mountain) and hunt area 14 (Fremont Lake), were created to better direct hunter effort in those specific areas. These new hunt areas did not increase the size of Wyoming's WTGMA, rather it reduced the size of existing hunt areas (hunt area 5 and 11).
- New for 2018 is that a person may purchase up to two gray wolf hunting licenses during any one calendar year. Bag and possession limit for any person with a proper license is one gray wolf per license during any one calendar year.
- Reporting requirement changes for 2018 include: (1) a change from 5 days to 3 days in presenting the pelt and skull of a harvested wolf to a designated WGFD employee or location for

registration, and (2) if a wolf is harvested in a wilderness area, the pelt and skull shall be presented to designated WGFD employee or location for registration within 3 days after returning from the wilderness or within ten days of harvest, whichever occurs first.

The 2018 Wyoming wolf hunting regulations are consistent with the Service approved Wyoming Gray Wolf Management Plan. Wyoming Statutes and the Wyoming Gray Wolf Management Plan direct WGFD to maintain a minimum of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs in Wyoming outside of Yellowstone National Park (YNP) and the Wind River Reservation (WRR; YNP and WRR will manage for at least 50 wolves and 5 breeding pairs between them). While some aspects of the 2018 wolf hunting regulations have been liberalized specifically to increase and better direct harvest (e.g., season length, total mortality limit, creation of two new hunt areas, bag and possession limit), based on 2017 minimum estimates of ≥ 238 wolves and ≥ 19 breeding pairs in Wyoming outside of YNP and WRR, the State has thus far maintained wolf populations well above minimum requirements. Upon review, the Service does not believe the regulatory changes adopted for the 2018 wolf hunting season represents a significant threat to the Wyoming wolf population, therefore, a full status review is not warranted.

Although regulatory changes were made to increase harvest in Wyoming, based upon knowledge and experience of wolf harvest trends in Idaho and Montana, the Service does not anticipate a significant increase in harvest during the 2018 Wyoming wolf hunting season. As a result, it is unlikely that the new regulations will cause the population to drop near the minimum management level (minimum of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs) required of the Service. However, if Wyoming's regulations continue to be liberalized and the population is reduced closer to minimum levels, the Service expects Wyoming to address these issues through an adaptive management strategy which may include, but not be limited to, a reduction in statewide harvest limits and increased monitoring intensity to accurately document changes in population size.