



Memorandum of Understanding Protection of Genetic Diversity of Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolves

WHEREAS, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has identified a metapopulation of gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) consisting of three population areas; northwestern Montana, central Idaho, and the Greater Yellowstone Area (Figure 1);

WHEREAS, the recovery standard adopted by the FWS for delisting of the distinct population segment of gray wolves recommended a metapopulation of at least 30 breeding pairs and at least 300 wolves equitably distributed among the three population areas and states and that no population area remain totally isolated either because of low natural connectivity or lack of action by the responsible management agency to implement human-assisted genetic management strategies if any population area showed signs of adverse genetic drift or inbreeding depression;

WHEREAS, the wolves in northwestern Montana, central Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone Area are currently as genetically diverse as source populations in Canada and inadequate genetic diversity is not a conservation issue at this time because natural conditions, wolf dispersal capabilities, and management frameworks have and will continue to enable successful wolf movement and dispersal between and among population areas into the future;

WHEREAS, genetic exchange has been documented by radio telemetry data and genetic sampling among all three population areas, from both naturally dispersing wolves and relocated wolves - both of which are proven to increase demographic and genetic diversity;

WHEREAS, the FWS and Montana, Wyoming and Idaho (the States) desire to maintain the recovered status of the NRM gray wolf metapopulation and promote demographically robust populations and healthy genetic diversity among the three population areas of gray wolves now and into the future;

WHEREAS, as part of the delisting of gray wolves in the NRM, the States committed in their wolf plans to classify wolves as a species in need of management, or a game animal where necessary to meet management objectives; the States of Montana and Idaho committed to manage their respective state populations for at least 15 breeding pairs and at least 150 wolves; the State of Wyoming committed to manage for at least 10 breeding pairs and at least 100 wolves outside of Yellowstone National Park and the Wind River Reservation; and the States committed to always maintain at least the minimum number of at least 10 breeding pairs and at least 100 wolves, and promote the interchange of wolves among the three population areas;

WHEREAS, the FWS and the States have historically cooperated on matters of gray wolf conservation and management;

WHEREAS, on July 18, 2008 the Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana enjoined the March 28, 2008, Final Rule that removed the NRM distinct population segment of gray wolves from the federal list of endangered and threatened species based in part on concerns about a perceived lack of sufficiently documented genetic exchange;

WHEREAS, the FWS and the States desire to secure the recovered status of the NRM gray wolf metapopulation and assure gene flow among the three population areas of gray wolves either by natural connectivity or human-assisted techniques in the unlikely event that the population was showing signs of genetic inbreeding depression or detrimental genetic drift;

THEREFORE, in order to maintain and enhance gray wolf recovery and ensure robust population demographic performance and genetic variation of gray wolves in the NRM into the future, the States and the FWS agree as follows:

1. The States, in coordination with FWS, will coordinate in monitoring of wolf populations, including genetic monitoring and cross-boundary packs, and will share information. The States will report the results of their monitoring no less than annually.

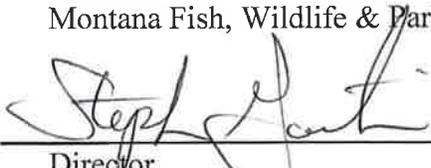
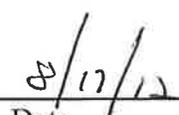
The States and FWS recognize that genetic diversity within the NRM wolf population is currently high and the States, in coordination with FWS, will jointly collaborate to continue to maintain a demographically robust population and preserve genetic diversity by ensuring opportunities for natural connectivity among the three population areas.

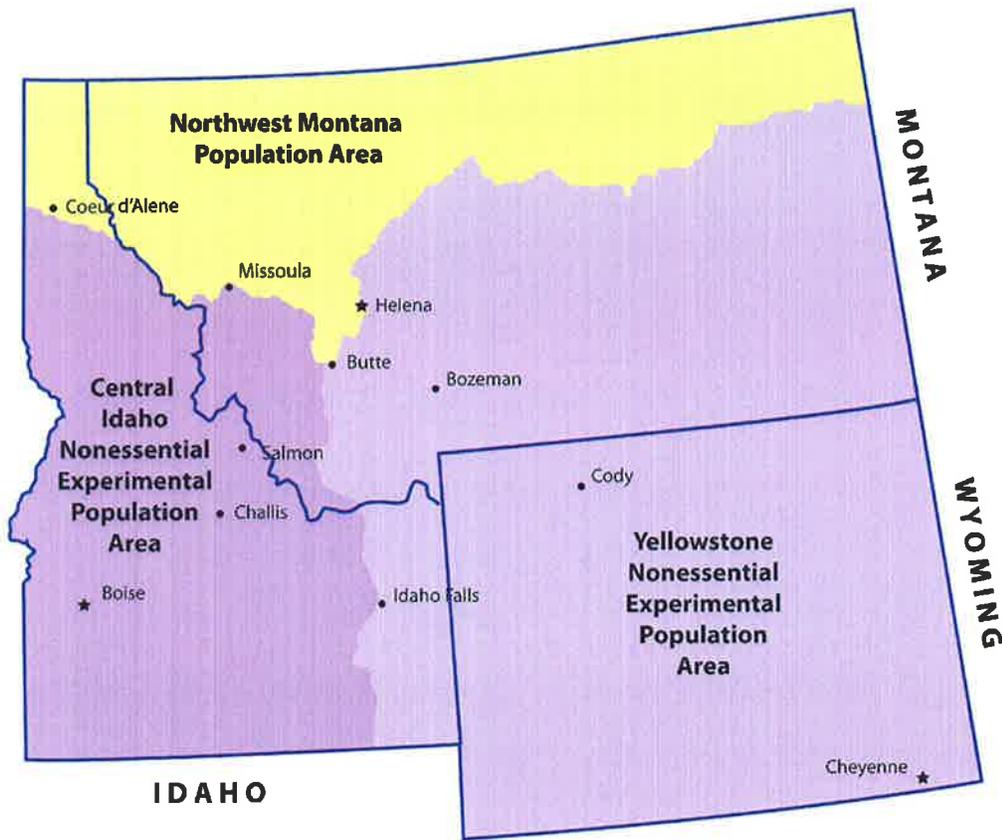
2. The States and FWS agree that natural dispersal among the three population areas facilitates maintenance of genetic diversity and is preferable, but if necessary, the States, in coordination with FWS, agree to implement human-assisted techniques to ensure genetic diversity.
3. If demographic or genetic monitoring suggests that wolf populations are likely to become threatened for genetic-related reasons, and that natural dispersal events were not likely to resolve such threats, translocation or other management techniques will be used to the extent necessary to completely resolve those issues.
4. The States further agree to maintain a sufficient population, apply adaptive management principles as outlined in the state plans, along with careful management and timing of human-caused mortality, to ensure natural dispersal among the population areas.
5. The States, in coordination with FWS, will assure gene flow among the three population areas of gray wolves by natural or human-assisted techniques to ensure adequate genetic diversity.

6. The States, in coordination with FWS, will establish and maintain a genetic monitoring protocol that will address the collection, storage, analysis and reporting of genetic data and trends from the NRM. Analysis of these genetic data will occur in an independent lab every 3 to 5 years.
7. The States, in coordination with FWS, will cooperate by coordinating on the funding and technical aspects of monitoring wolf population demographics and genetic variation of the NRM population. Should human assisted genetic management strategies become necessary, the States will coordinate by expediting issuance of permits required by law and provide personnel and equipment.
8. All signatories recognize that each has statutory responsibilities that cannot be delegated and that this MOU cannot abrogate any signatory's statutory responsibilities. This MOU is subject to and is intended to be consistent with all appropriate federal and state laws. This MOU does not obligate any of the undersigned agencies to the expenditure of funds except in accordance with lawful appropriations by the respective agencies. The undersigned agencies will take appropriate steps to seek funding to implement this MOU.
9. This MOU will be implemented upon final signature of all parties.
10. The States of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming and the FWS do not waive sovereign immunity by entering into this MOU and specifically retain all immunity and defense available to them under applicable law.

Director Idaho Department of Fish and Game	Date
	

Director Wyoming Game and Fish Department	Date
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Director Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	Date
	
Director U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6	Date



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Figure 1. Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population areas.