

Questions and Answers



Gray wolf, western U.S. 90-day finding

September 15, 2021

What is a 90-day finding? How does the petition process work?

Petitions are formal requests to list a species as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to make an initial finding within 90 days as to whether the petition includes “substantial information” indicating that a listing may be warranted. If a substantial finding is made, the next step is to conduct a status review and issue a further finding within 12 months as to whether listing is warranted. [Learn more about the petition process.](#)

What did the petitioners suggest are current threats?

Petitioners claim that potential increased human-caused mortality due to recent regulatory changes in Idaho and Montana may pose a threat to wolves in these states by expanding the means and methods of harvest such that the species may become threatened or endangered. They further assert that these states' regulatory mechanisms (laws, rules, policies, etc.) are insufficient to prevent the distinct population segment (DPS) from becoming threatened or endangered. The petitions also describe other potential threats, such as disease and loss of genetic diversity.

What states does this action affect?

Petitioners propose two options for listing, a Northern Rocky Mountain DPS or a western U.S. DPS. The first petition proposes listing a Northern Rocky Mountain DPS consisting of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, the eastern one-third of Washington and Oregon, and a small portion of north-central Utah. Both petitions also propose an alternative western U.S. DPS to include all, or part, of the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS states with the addition of California, Colorado, Nevada, and in one petition, northern Arizona.

What is a “Distinct Population Segment”?

The ESA allows the listing or delisting of a distinct population segment (DPS) of vertebrate (i.e., mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians). A DPS is a portion of a species' or subspecies' population or range. A DPS listing is described in geographic terms instead of biologically.

What did the Service conclude in their 90-day finding?

We found that the petitioners present credible and substantial information that increased human-caused mortality in Idaho and Montana may pose a threat to wolves in those two

States, and to the status of a potential Northern Rocky Mountains DPS or Western DPS as a whole, such that the DPS may be threatened or endangered.

What are the next steps?

The Service will now use the best available science to conduct a status assessment to fully analyze the threats to the gray wolf population in the Northern Rocky Mountains and Western U.S. and issue a 12-month finding as to whether listing is warranted.