



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Gray Wolf

Northern Rocky Mountains

Genetic Diversity

Gary Kramer / USFWS

About the Gray Wolf

The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is the largest wild member of the dog family. Distinguished by a broad snout and round ears, gray wolves are typically 2.5 feet tall, 5-6 feet long, and weigh 80-100 pounds. Wolves can live up to 13 years, but in the northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) 4 years is an average lifespan. The gray wolf is a social species and lives in packs which include a breeding pair, their offspring, and other, often related, non-breeding adults. Packs typically average 6-10 members in winter. Packs occupy distinct territories from 200-500 square miles, which they defend against other wolves. Wolves were plentiful throughout most of North America, until the early 20th century when government-sponsored predator control programs, poison, and declines in prey brought them near extinction in the lower 48 states. Wolves were exterminated in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and southwestern Canada by the 1930s.

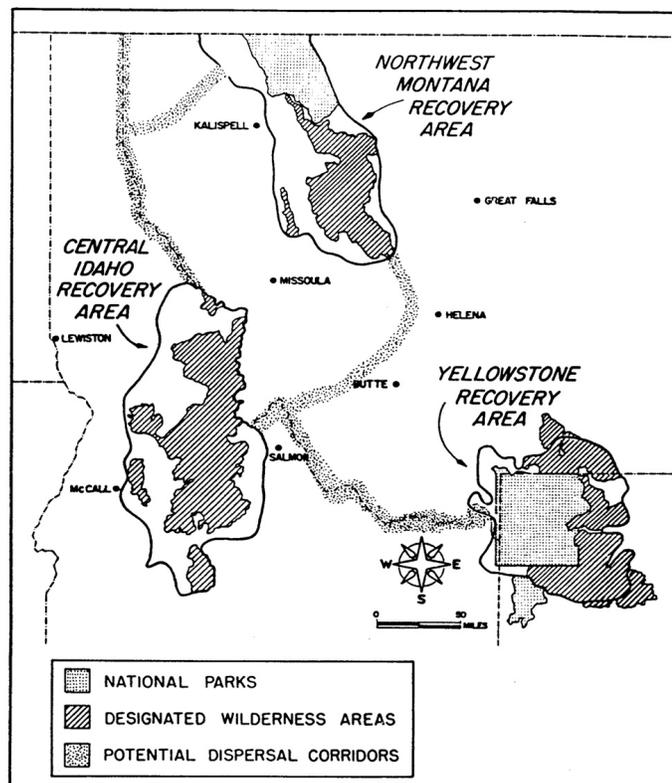
History

In 1974, the northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). For the first time in over 50 years, naturally dispersing wolves from Canada established dens in northwestern Montana in 1986. In 1987, the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) developed a wolf recovery plan with a goal of 10 breeding pairs and 100 wolves for the next 3 years in the core areas of northwestern Montana, central Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone Area.

In 1994, the Service completed a Congressionally-mandated Environmental Impact Statement

(EIS) on the reintroduction of gray wolves in the NRM. Wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in 1995 and 1996. The NRM wolf population met the recovery goal of > 300 wolves and > 30 breeding pairs for at least 3 successive years in 2002. By December 2009, the NRM wolf population contained over 1,706 wolves in 242 packs and



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Gray wolf with radio-collar / USFWS

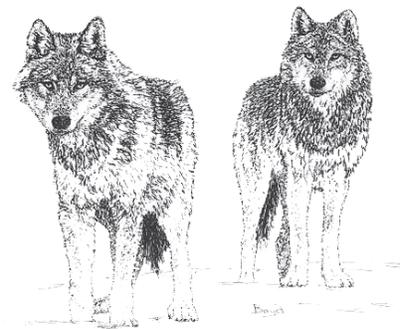
115 of the packs met the criteria for a breeding pair (a pack that contain at least 1 adult male, 1 adult female, and 2 pups on December 31) and had achieved its numerical goal for 8 consecutive years.

On February 27, 2008, the Service issued a final rule (“2008 Rule”) designating the northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf Distinct Population Segment (DPS) and removing it from the list of threatened and endangered species. The distinct population segment encompassed all of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, as well as parts of eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, and northern Utah. The Federal district Court in Montana relisted wolves in part because of a lack of documented genetic exchange.

On April 2, 2009 the Service once again delisted the NRM DPS, except for Wyoming where federal protections remained in place. On August 5, 2010 the Montana court relisted wolves again because Wyoming could not be left out of the NRM DPS. At this time wolves remain listed.

Genetic Diversity

A recent publication by vonHoldt et al. 2010 (Molecular Ecology) proved that wolves routinely moved between all three recovery areas and from Canada and they successfully bred. This research suggests the NRM DPS has outstanding genetic health that will be maintained into the future solely by natural dispersal even if the northern Rocky Mountain wolf population was managed below 846 wolves. The northern Rocky Mountain wolf population is simply a 400 mile southern extension of a vast connected wolf population in western Canada that contains >12,000 wolves.



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