

Peer Review Plan for Proposed Rule:

Removing the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Maintaining Protections for the Mexican Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) by Listing It as Endangered

About the Document:

Title: Removing the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Maintaining Protections for the Mexican Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) by Listing It as Endangered

Timeline of the Peer review:

Draft document disseminated: June 12, 2013

Peer review initiated: June 2013

Peer review to be completed by: Close of the comment period, September 11, 2013

Final determination regarding proposed rule expected by: December 2014

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270) and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intends to subject this proposal to peer review. This review will occur during the public comment period for the proposed rule.

We will select a minimum of three and a maximum of seven independent peer reviewers and invite individual comment letters from the each reviewer. The peer reviewers will include individuals with a variety of professional qualifications and experience related to gray wolf life history, biology, ecology, population viability, genetics, and taxonomy.

Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Expertise in gray wolf ecology.
- Independence: Reviewers will not be employed by the Service. Academic and consulting scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service, if the government supports their work.
- Objectivity: Reviewers will be recognized by their peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. The reviewers should be comfortable sharing their knowledge and identifying their knowledge gaps.
- Advocacy: Reviewers will not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of this species under the Endangered Species Act.
- Conflict of Interest: Reviewers will not have any financial or other interest that conflicts with or that could impair their objectivity.

We will provide instructions for peer reviewers explaining their role. Peer reviewers will be

asked to comment specifically on the quality of any information and analyses used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and characterized, and that potential implications of uncertainties for the technical conclusions drawn are clear; and provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document.

The specific questions we will ask peer reviewers to comment on include:

- (1) Did the Service include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions / arguments / conclusions?
- (2) Is there additional biological, commercial trade, or other relevant information concerning our analysis of the current *C. lupus* listed entity and is the approach taken in our analysis adequate, particularly with respect to our interpretation of the term “population” as it relates to the 1996 Policy Regarding the Recognition of Distinct Vertebrate Population Segments (DPS policy) (61 FR 4722, February 7, 1996) and specifically to gray wolves. As noted above, please do not comment on Service policy (such as the DPS policy or our approach to defining the term population), but rather on the strength of the biological information and how we applied it in our analysis.
- (3) Is there additional information not considered in the rule concerning the genetics and taxonomy of the eastern wolf, *Canis lycaon*? We are not requesting information on the status of *C. lycaon* because we are conducting a status review for this species and peer review of that document will occur separately.
- (4) Does the proposed rule utilize the best available science and draw reasonable and scientifically sound conclusions concerning the status of the gray wolf in the Pacific Northwest United States; the gray wolf subspecies *Canis lupus nubilus*; the gray wolf subspecies *C. l. occidentalis*; and the gray wolf subspecies *C. l. baileyi*? Information requested for each includes:
 - (a) Genetics and taxonomy;
 - (b) Do the scientific conclusions reached by the Service follow from the evidence provided;
 - (c) New information concerning range, distribution, population size, and population trends;
 - (d) New biological or other relevant data concerning any threat (or lack thereof) to these subspecies, their habitat, or both; and
 - (e) New information regarding conservation measures for these populations, their habitat, or both.

Peer reviewers will be asked to submit their comments by the end of the comment period (September 11, 2013). Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will be included in the administrative record of our final determination regarding this proposal.

We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in a special section of

the final rulemaking determination. Because this peer review process is running concurrently with public review of the proposed action, peer reviewers will not be provided public comments (although comments may be viewed through <http://www.regulations.gov>). A final determination regarding this proposal is expected by late December 2014.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated following publication of the proposed rule. The public may comment on the approach of this peer review through the normal comment process associated with the proposed rule. Public comments will be accepted for 90 days after publication of the proposed rule. The public comment period will close September 11, 2013. You may submit comments by one of the following methods:

- **Electronically:** Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS–HQ–ES–2013–0073, which is the docket number for this rulemaking. Please ensure you have found the correct document before submitting your comments. If your comments will fit in the provided comment box, please use this feature of <http://regulations.gov>, as it is most compatible with our comment–review procedures. If you attach your comments as a separate document, our preferred file format is Microsoft Word. If you attach multiple comments (such as form letters), our preferred format is a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel.
- **By hard copy:** Submit by U.S. mail or hand–delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–HQ–ES–2013–0073; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042–PDM; Arlington, Virginia 22203.

E-mail or faxed comments will not be accepted. All comments will be posted on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that any personal information you provide will be posted (see the Public Comments section of the proposed rule for more information).

Contact

For more information, contact Headquarters Office, Ecological Services; telephone (703) 358–2171. Direct all questions or requests for additional information to: GRAY WOLF QUESTIONS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Headquarters Office, Endangered Species Program, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 420, Arlington, Virginia 22203. Individuals who are hearing-impaired or speech-impaired may call the Federal Relay Service at 1–800–877–8337 for TTY assistance.