

Peer Review Plan: Species Status Assessment for the Western Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

Timeline of the Peer review (estimated):

Draft documents to be disseminated: May 2022

Peer review to be initiated: May 2022

Peer review to be completed by: June 2022

Determination regarding species' status expected: This Species Status Assessment (SSA) report will help inform a status review and 12-month finding for gray wolves in response to two petitions received during the summer of 2021. We anticipate delivering a 12-month finding with this listing determination to the *Federal Register* by September 30, 2022.

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our SSA Report for the Western Gray Wolf.

Via an outside contractor, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will request peer review from three or more independent experts. The Contractor will consider the following criteria when selecting reviewers:

- Expertise: The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with wolves or similar species biology and/or population modeling.
- Independence: The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- Objectivity: The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- Conflict of Interest: The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the contractor will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the SSA Report for the Western Gray Wolf. The Contractor will solicit reviews from at least three to five qualified experts. After completion of the peer review and 12-month finding, we will make the peer reviewers' comments and conflict of interest forms available to

the public.

The Contractor will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the draft SSA report, and a list of citations, as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the SSA process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts.

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Contractor, who will relay them to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding this species' status (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and (2) be available to the public once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our recommendations.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by April 15, 2022, in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the SSA process. This SSA report will help inform a status review and 12-month finding for western gray wolves; we anticipate delivering a 12-month finding with this listing determination to the *Federal Register* by September 30, 2022.

Contact

For more information, contact Maricela Constantino, at 571-969-9804 or maricela_constantino@fws.gov.