

Species Fact Sheet

Gray wolf

Canus lupus



**STATUS:
ENDANGERED**

**NORTHERN ROCKY
MOUNTAIN DPS:
DELISTED**

Gray wolves potentially occur in these Washington counties: Asotin, Chelan, Clark, Columbia, King, Klickitat, Lewis, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Stevens, Walla Walla, Whatcom, Whitman, Yakima, Okanogan, Kittitas, and Pend Oreille

(Map may reflect historical as well as recent sightings)

The gray wolf, *Canus lupus*, was federally listed as endangered throughout the lower 48 states, except Minnesota, by USFWS in 1978. In 2011, gray wolves in a portion of the Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment (DPS) encompassing Idaho, Montana and parts of Oregon, Washington and Utah were delisted. In Washington, gray wolves that occur outside of the boundaries of this DPS remain federally listed as endangered.

Current and Historical Status

Historically, gray wolves were common throughout Washington. Trapping of wolves for pelts increased in the early 1820s, following the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company. The trade or sale of 14,810 pelts was documented between 1821 and 1859. As more settlers and ranchers moved into the region wolves were poisoned,

trapped, and shot. Consequently, by 1900 wolves were eliminated from most areas, except in a few remote locations. On the Olympic Peninsula, the population was estimated at 115 individuals in 1910. However, this population declined rapidly and was nearly gone by the late 1930s. Wolves were also reported in low numbers in the early 1900s in the southern Cascades, Mt Rainier, the northern Cascades, and Blue Mountains but disappeared by 1940s.

The Northern Rocky Mountain (NRM) wolf population has a range (wolf breeding pairs, wolf packs, and routine dispersing wolves) that encompasses all of Idaho, most of Montana and Wyoming. Parts of Oregon, Utah, and eastern Washington are also included within the NRM DPS because these areas are within 60 to 190 miles from the core wolf population and are routinely used by dispersing wolves.

The NRM population achieved its recovery goals at the end of 2000 and continues to exceed these goals. State wolf management plans were developed to ensure that adequate regulatory mechanisms would exist once federal protection was removed. In 2011, a portion of gray wolves in the NRM DPS were delisted. In Washington, the NRM DPS includes that portion of Washington east of the centerline of Highway 97 and Highway 17 north of Mesa and that portion of Washington east of the centerline of Highway 395 south of Mesa.

Reliable and probable sightings have occurred in Washington since the 1940s. In the early 1990s sightings in the North Cascades were thought to be individuals originating in British Columbia. Between 1990 and 1995, 20 confirmed sightings were reported in the Cascades and eastern WA. These sightings consisted of individuals and several family units. Efforts to investigate probable sightings have increased since the 1990's resulting in the discovery of four breeding packs. It is likely that additional packs occur in Washington. (WDFW Draft Conservation Plan 2008).

Description and Life History

Adult gray wolves generally weigh between 70-110 pounds. They tend to be black, white, or gray in coloration, with broad, blocky faces and muzzles and short rounded ears. Wolves are up to 2 ½ ft tall at the shoulders and 6 ft in length. Adult tracks are generally 5 inches long and 4 ½ inches wide.

Gray wolves are a highly social species and live in packs. The pack typically consists of a dominant breeding pair (alphas), their offspring from the previous year, and new pups. The pack hunts, feeds, travels, rests, and rear the pups together. The size of the pack depends on

rate of growth of the pack and food availability. Lone nomadic individuals generally exist as dispersers in a population. These wolves look for vacant habitat to establish a new home range or search for an existing pack to join (Fuller et al. 2003).

Wolves primarily prey on medium and large mammals, such as deer, elk, and moose.

Wolves can live 13 years but the average lifespan in the NRM is less than 4 years. Females and males typically begin breeding as 2-year-olds and may produce young annually until they are over 10 years old. Litters are typically born in April and average around 5 pups. The pups are born in dens, usually underground burrows, but can occur in abandoned beaver lodges, hollow trees, and shallow rock caves.

Habitat

Habitat once occupied by wolves has been reduced by development and land conversion; many areas now exist as fragments. Packs typically occupy large distinct territories, 200 to 500 square miles, and defend these areas from other wolves or packs. Suitable wolf habitat is generally characterized as public land with mountainous, forested habitat that contains abundant year-round prey, low road density, low numbers of domestic livestock and sheep, low agricultural use, and few people.

Wolves are habitat generalists and are theoretically capable of inhabiting a wide range of Washington ecosystems, including some that might be considered marginal. An initial analysis for Washington suggests that suitable habitat for wolves potentially occurs throughout the state except in the Columbia Basin and Puget Trough lowlands.

Reasons for Decline

As Europeans began settling the U.S., wolves were poisoned, trapped, and shot, causing this once widespread species to be eradicated from most of its range in the 48 conterminous States.

Conservation Efforts

The State of Washington has established a wolf working group advisory committee and has prepared a gray wolf conservation and management plan. In addition, strategies for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting have been developed to determine annual population

status and trends.

Wolves from both recently-discovered packs have been fitted either with satellite-telemetry tracking collars or radio collars to track their movement.

References and Links

[USFWS Rangewide Information](#)

[USFWS Species Profile](#)

[WDFW](#)

[Wolfhaven](#)