

Wolves Delisted: Idaho Perspective

May 2009

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's rule delisting gray wolves in the Northern Rockies and Western Great Lakes took effect Monday May 4. The rule affects wolves in Idaho, Montana, and parts of Washington, Oregon and Utah, but not in Wyoming, as well as the Western Great Lakes region.

Idaho state officials welcome the long awaited delisting.

"Our plan is to manage wolves as we do other big game," Idaho Fish and Game Director Cal Groen said. "This is good news for wolves, elk, rural communities and hunters. I believe this action will help defuse the animosity and anger associated with wolves when we can manage wolves in concert with our other big game species."

Fish and Game will apply the same professional wildlife management practices to wolves that it has applied to all big game species, which all have recovered from low populations during the early 1900s, he said.

Wolf hunting seasons dates have been set this fall. Hunt quotas will be set in August.

Legal challenges, however, are expected, and they could result in an injunction blocking the delisting.

Below are some quick facts and answers to some common questions. For additional information about wolf recovery and delisting in Idaho and the Northern Rocky Mountains go to the wolf page on Idaho Fish and Game's Web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>.

Fact Sheet: Wolf Delisting

Wolves are recovered in the Northern Rocky Mountains

- The Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population first met the biological recovery goals in 2002. The Northern Rockies regional population is comprised of wolf populations in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. About 1,600 wolves now live in the region, where wolves can travel about freely to join existing packs or form new packs. This, combined with contiguous wolf populations in Canada and Alaska, assures genetic diversity.
- The decision to remove the wolf from the federal endangered species list took effect May 4. Legal challenges may block or delay actual delisting.
- Federal rules require Idaho to maintain a minimum of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs, and to manage for more than 150 wolves and 15 breeding pairs.



Idaho Wolves: At a glance

Numbers: At the end of 2008

- 846 wolves, 88 packs of which 39 are considered breeding pairs. About 1,600 are found in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.
- 130 wolves in 56 packs had radio collars in early 2009.

Distribution:

- Wolves are found from the Canadian border to near Interstate 84 in southern Idaho, with most in the national forests of the central part of the state.
- Most of this year's population growth has been in the Panhandle; the population south of Interstate 90 has increased only slightly.

Current Status:

- Wolves in all of Idaho are no longer protected as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.
- All wolves are now under the management of state law.

What's Next:

- Wolves in the entire state will be managed as big game, and Idaho Fish and Game is the lead agency charged with managing wolves.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services will continue to assist with predator control in wolf depredation incidents.
- Idaho will monitor wolves and make annual reports to U.S. Fish and Wildlife for the following five years.
- The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has set wolf hunting seasons under the guidelines set out in the 2008 Wolf Population Management Plan.
- Hunt quotas will be set in August by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

- An estimated 846 wolves inhabited Idaho in 2008 in about 88 packs, at least 39 of which were documented as breeding pairs. Estimates suggest the 2008 population is about 15 percent higher than 2007.
- In early 2009, 130 wolves in 56 of the 88 packs had radio-collars.

Wolf Delisting and Idaho

- Idaho Fish and Game and American Indian tribes on their respective reservations have full legal authority for wolf conservation and management in Idaho. The Nez Perce Tribe has an agreement with Idaho to continue monitoring wolves in the Clearwater Region and McCall sub-region.
- The line separating Idaho into the endangered area north of Interstate 90 and the southern experimental area, south of the interstate, no longer exists.
- The wolf are reclassified under Idaho law and managed as a big game species statewide.
- Idaho laws protect wolves. Wolves can be legally killed only:
 - During a legal hunting season set by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.
 - If the wolf is seen molesting or attacking livestock or domestic animals.
 - To protect human life.
 - As authorized by Idaho Fish and Game to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts.

Wolf Monitoring

- Throughout the year, Idaho Fish and Game and the Nez Perce Tribe determine the status of known packs, verify new wolf activity, and determine whether a pack produced pups, and how many survived to the end of the year.
- Fish and Game is required to report the minimum total number of wolves, the number of packs of two or more wolves and the number of breeding pairs to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for at least five years after delisting.
- Fish and Game routinely monitors wolves for health and disease. Fish and Game also collects tissue samples and uses radio telemetry information to monitor genetic diversity and wolf dispersal.

Wolves, Livestock and Pets

- Under Idaho Fish and Game administrative rules, all Idaho landowners and livestock producers may haze, harass or kill a wolf that is molesting or attacking livestock or domestic animals on public or private land. Such incidents, however, must be reported to Fish and Game within 72 hours. The flexibility is provided in Idaho law that also pertains to mountain lions or black bears caught damaging private property.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services investigates reports of injured or dead livestock to see if they are wolf related and carries out lethal and nonlethal control of wolves at Fish and Game's direction.

Wolf Hunting Season

- The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has established a 2009 fall season according to the approved wolf population management

plan in March. Hunt quotas will be set in August.

- In August the commission will set limits on the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters within each of the 12 wolf management units. Limits would be tracked by requiring successful hunters to report their harvest within 72 hours. When a management unit limit is met, the season would close on 24-hour notice.
- The wolf population would be monitored before, during and after the hunting season to determine how it responds.
- Wolf season dates would correspond to Idaho's early back country and general big game rifle seasons.

Cost and Funding

- Idaho's wolf conservation and management program is expected to cost about \$1.2 million a year.
- To fund wolf management, Idaho maintains the continuation of federal funding is critical to the long term success of recovery efforts. Idaho will continue efforts to secure federal funding and combine it with revenue from the sale of wolf hunting tags, private sources and other contributions.

Federal Oversight for Five Years

- Idaho must monitor the wolf population and annually submit population status reports to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for at least five years.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife will monitor how each state carries out its management plan, regulations and state laws.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife also will examine any change in state plans or laws to determine whether it would jeopardize the population and could relist the gray wolf if changes are significant and could jeopardize Idaho's population or the tri-state regional population.

Wolves Can Be Relisted

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife can initiate a status review to determine whether relisting is warranted for three reasons:
 - If the wolf population falls below wolf population recovery levels of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs in either Montana, Idaho or Wyoming.
 - If the wolf population in Montana, Idaho or Wyoming falls below 150 wolves or 15 breeding pairs in any of the states for three consecutive years.
 - If a change in state law or management objectives would significantly increase the threat to the wolf population.
- A federal judge or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife could also relist the northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population in response to legal challenges.

Frequently Asked Questions: Gray Wolf Delisting

Q. What's changed in Idaho after delisting?

The line separating the endangered area north of Interstate 90 and the experimental area south of the interstate no longer exists. Idaho has one legal classification of wolves as big game animals statewide, which offers wildlife protections under state law. Under this state law, wolves could be purposely killed legally only under four conditions:

- Legal hunting or trapping during an official season authorized by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.
- If seen killing or threatening to kill (biting, wounding, harassing chasing, attacking or molesting) livestock and domestic animals.
- To protect human life.
- As authorized by Idaho Fish and Game to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts.

Q. What happened when the old federal classifications expired?

The federal regulations in the northern and southern Idaho no longer apply. Federal regulations have been replaced by state laws, Idaho administrative rules, and the federally approved state wolf management plan.

Q. Who is responsible now for managing wolves in Idaho?

Idaho Fish and Game is the lead agency for wolf conservation and management in Idaho. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services will be responsible for investigating injured or dead livestock to determine whether wolves were responsible. Wildlife Services also will continue to assist Idaho Fish and Game with resolving wolf-livestock conflicts through lethal and nonlethal methods. The Nez Perce Tribe has an agreement with the Idaho to assist in monitoring wolves in a part of the state. Wolves on reservation lands will be managed under authority of the respective tribes.

Q. What will this responsibility cost?

Fish and Game estimates that wolf conservation and management will cost between \$900,000 and \$1.2 million per year. No single source of funding has been identified and Idaho expects to use a combination of sources, including wolf hunting tag sales. Fish and Game will continue working with the Idaho congressional delegation to maintain federal funding. National interest in conserving popular species like wolves and grizzly bears also brings with it a national responsibility to help fund their management.

Q. How will decisions about problem wolves be made?

State law and administrative rules have automatically replaced federal regulations. Fish and Game decisions to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts will be based on the state's federally approved Wolf Management Plan and administrative rules adopted by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission in 2008. The plan and administrative rules outline an incremental management approach guided by wolf numbers, the

location of conflicts, depredation history of the pack, potential for additional losses, and pack size. Fish and Game will continue to rely on USDA Wildlife Services' investigations of injured or dead livestock suspected to be wolf-related.

Q. What about Idaho's wolf hunting or trapping season?

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has established a 2009 season according to the approved wolf population management plan. The season does not include trapping. The timing of actual license sales is unknown but would depend on legal challenges. The commission would set limits on the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters within each of the 12 wolf management zones. Limits would be tracked by requiring successful hunters to report their harvest within 72 hours. When a management zone limit is met, the season would close on 24-hour notice. The season dates would follow Idaho's big game rifle hunting seasons. The wolf population would be carefully monitored before, during and after the hunting season to determine how it responds.

Q. Are wolves recovered in the northern Rocky Mountains?

Yes. U.S. Fish and Wildlife concluded that the northern Rockies wolf population is recovered and can be delisted. The numeric recovery goal was set at a minimum of 30 breeding pairs and 300 wolves in the tri-state region for three consecutive years. At the end of 2008, there were about 1,600 wolves and 107 breeding pairs. A second aspect of the recovery goal is that the three wolf populations in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming make up a larger regional population where wolves have the ability to disperse and travel throughout the region to join existing packs or start new packs. This assures genetic diversity, especially given that Idaho's and Montana's wolf populations connect with much larger wolf populations in Canada and Alaska. Successful dispersal and mixing of wolves from different parts of the region and with wolves north of the international border assures that loss of genetic diversity will not be a problem in the future.

Q. What wolves were removed from the federal endangered species list?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisting rule affects wolves in Idaho, Montana, eastern Oregon, eastern Washington, and a small portion of northwest Utah will be delisted. The entire state of Wyoming, however, will retain federal Endangered Species Act protections for wolves. The decision took effect May 4.

Q. How many wolves are there in Idaho and the northern Rocky Mountains?

Idaho is committed to maintaining a secure, recovered population and will manage for 500 to 700 wolves. At the end of 2008, tentative numbers estimate a minimum of about 846 wolves inhabited Idaho in

88 packs, 39 of which were classified as breeding pairs and each had at least two pups survive until December 31. Estimates for 2008 suggest the population is about 15 percent higher than 2007 levels.

Q. Can Idaho change its plan and state laws after delisting?

U.S. Fish and Wildlife would review any significant changes to Idaho's laws, administrative rules or wolf management plan to determine whether such changes would jeopardize maintenance of a recovered population and warrant relisting under the Endangered Species Act.

Q. Will this wolf recovery decision be challenged in federal court?

Yes, state and federal officials expect a court challenge.

Q. Under what circumstances could wolves be relisted under the ESA?

In general, three scenarios would lead U.S. Fish and Wildlife to initiate a status review and analysis of threats to determine if relisting was warranted, including:

- 1) If the wolf population falls below wolf population recovery levels of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs in Idaho, Montana or Wyoming.
- 2) If the wolf population in Idaho, Montana or Wyoming falls below 150 wolves or 15 breeding pairs in any of the states for three consecutive years.
- 3) If a change in state law or management objectives would significantly increase the threat to the wolf population.

A federal judge or US Fish and Wildlife could also relist the northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population in response to legal challenges. See the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website for additional information: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Q. What is the role of the federal government after delisting?

Each state is required to report the population status annually to U.S. Fish and Wildlife for at least five years. The federal agency will also examine how each state carries out its management plan and implements its respective state laws and regulations.

Q. What is a Status Review, and what triggers it?

A "status review" is when U.S. Fish and Wildlife evaluates the potential threats to a species' long-term survival. This is done periodically while there are ongoing efforts to recover a rare or imperiled species. A

status review could be triggered if the number of wolves and breeding pairs drops below acceptable minimum levels. The status review also could determine what corrective actions are required to reverse the declines.

Q. What happens if wolves are relisted?

Gray wolves north of Interstate 90 would again be classified as endangered. Wolves south of the interstate would be classified as an "experimental, nonessential population," with some management flexibility to protect livestock, dogs, and affected elk and deer herds. USDA Wildlife Services would still investigate to determine the cause of injured or dead livestock and would continue assisting Fish and Game with resolving wolf-livestock conflicts through lethal and nonlethal methods. As long as federal funding is available, Fish and Game and the Nez Perce Tribe will continue as the lead agencies for wolf conservation, monitoring and management in Idaho.

Q. What population parameters will be monitored?

Through the year, Idaho Fish and Game will verify new wolf activity, determine whether packs den, whether pups were born and whether at least two pups and two adults survived to the end of the calendar year. At the end of each calendar year, Fish and Game takes a snapshot of the minimum Idaho population. Fish and Game prepares an annual report that lists the minimum total number of wolves, the number of packs of four or more wolves and the number of breeding pairs, as required by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. To estimate the wolf population, Fish and Game confirms the minimum number of packs, using telemetry data and confirmed public and agency personnel reports. It then multiplies that by the average pack size, adds small groups of wolves and estimates a percentage of lone dispersing wolves – usually 12.5 percent. Fish and Game has been investigating alternative methods to monitor and estimate the population with equal reliability. In the future, Fish and Game hopes that through a variety of approaches, population monitoring will be more cost effective but equally reliable. In addition, Fish and Game monitors all wolves handled for health and disease, which yields information about overall health of the animal, old injuries or wounds, and parasites. Also, through collection of tissue samples and movement information using radio telemetry, Fish and Game is able to monitor wolf dispersal and genetic diversity.

To learn more about Idaho's wolf population, and to read Idaho's annual wolf program reports, visit the Idaho Fish and Game Website at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>.