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Secretary Salazar Affirms Decision to Delist Gray Wolves in Western Great Lakes, Portion of Northern Rockies

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today affirmed the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove gray wolves from the list of threatened and endangered species in the western Great Lakes and the Northern Rocky Mountain states of Idaho and Montana and parts of Washington, Oregon and Utah. Wolves will remain a protected species in Wyoming.

“The recovery of the gray wolf throughout significant portions of its historic range is one of the great success stories of the Endangered Species Act,” Salazar said. “When it was listed as endangered in 1974, the wolf had almost disappeared from the continental United States. Today, we have more than 5,500 wolves, including more than 1,600 in the Rockies.”

“The successful recovery of this species is a stunning example of how the Act can work to keep imperiled animals from sliding into extinction,” he said. “The recovery of the wolf has not been the work of the federal government alone. It has been a long and active partnership including states, tribes, landowners, academic researchers, sportsmen and other conservation groups, the Canadian government and many other partners.”

The Fish and Wildlife Service originally announced the decision to delist the wolf in January, but the new administration decided to review the decision as part of an overall regulatory review when it came into office. The Service will now send the delisting regulation to the Federal Register for publication.

The Service decided to delist the wolf in Idaho and Montana because they have approved state wolf management plans in place that will ensure the conservation of the species in the future.

At the same time, the Service determined wolves in Wyoming would still be listed under the Act because Wyoming’s current state law and wolf management plan are not sufficient to conserve its

portion of northern Rocky Mountain wolf population.

Gray wolves were previously listed as endangered in the lower 48 states, except in Minnesota where they were listed as threatened. The Service oversees three separate recovery programs for the gray wolf; each has its own recovery plan and recovery goals based on the unique characteristics of wolf populations in each geographic area.

Wolves in other parts of the 48 states, including the Southwest wolf population, remain endangered and are not affected by the actions taken today.

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Fact Sheet: Northern Rocky Mountain wolves

The northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment includes all of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, the eastern one-third of Washington and Oregon, and a small part of north-central Utah. The minimum recovery goal for wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains is at least 30 breeding pairs and at least 300 wolves for at least three consecutive years, a goal that was attained in 2002 and has been exceeded every year since. There are currently about 95 breeding pairs and 1,600 wolves in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming.

The Service believes that with approved state management plans in place in Montana and Idaho, all threats to the wolf population will be sufficiently reduced or eliminated in those states. Montana and Idaho will always manage for more than 15 breeding pairs and 150 wolves per state and their target population level is about 400 wolves in Montana and 500 in Idaho.

As a result of a Montana United States District Court decision on July 18, 2008, the Service reexamined Wyoming law, its management plans and implementing regulations. While the Service has approved wolf management plans in Montana and Idaho, it has determined that Wyoming's state law and wolf management plan are not sufficient to conserve Wyoming's portion of a recovered northern Rocky Mountain wolf population. Therefore, even though Wyoming is included in the northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment, the subpopulation of gray wolves in Wyoming is not being removed from protection of the Endangered Species Act.

Continued management under the Endangered Species Act by the Service will ensure that wolves in Wyoming will be conserved. Acting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Rowan Gould said the Service will continue to work with the State of Wyoming in developing its state regulatory framework so that the state can continue to maintain its share of a recovered northern Rocky Mountain population. Once adequate state regulatory mechanisms are in place, the Service could propose removing the Act's protections for wolves in Wyoming. National parks and the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming already have adequate regulatory mechanisms in place to conserve wolves. However, at this time, wolves will remain protected as a nonessential, experimental population under the ESA throughout the state, including within the boundaries of the Wind River Reservation and national park and refuge units.

Fact Sheet: Western Great Lakes

The Service's delisting of the gray wolf also applies to gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment. As the result of another legal ruling from the Washington D.C. United States District Court on September 29, 2008, the Service reexamined its legal authorization to simultaneously identify and delist a population of wolves in the western Great Lakes. The Service today reissued the delisting decision in order to comply with the Court's concerns.

The area included in the DPS boundary includes the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan as well as parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. The DPS includes all the areas currently occupied by wolf packs in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, as well as nearby areas in these states in which wolf packs may become established in the future. The DPS also includes surrounding areas into which wolves may disperse but are not likely to establish packs.

Rebounding from a few hundred wolves in Minnesota in the 1970s when listed as endangered, the region's gray wolf population now numbers about 4,000 and occupies large portions of Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. Wolf numbers in the three states have exceeded the numerical recovery criteria established in the species' recovery plan for several years. In Minnesota, the population is estimated at 2,922. The estimated wolf population in Wisconsin is a minimum of 537, and about 520 wolves are believed to inhabit Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources have developed plans to guide wolf management actions in the future. The Service has determined that these plans establish a sufficient basis for long-term wolf management. They address issues such as protective regulations, control of problem animals, possible hunting and trapping seasons, and the long-term health of the wolf population, and will be governed by the appropriate state or tribe.

The Service will monitor the delisted wolf populations for a minimum of five years to ensure that they continue to sustain their recovery. At the end of the monitoring period, the Service will decide if relisting, continued monitoring or ending Service monitoring is appropriate.

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