

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
FINAL REVISION OF THE SPECIAL REGULATION FOR THE  
CENTRAL IDAHO AND YELLOWSTONE AREA  
NONESSENTIAL EXPERIMENTAL  
POPULATIONS OF GRAY WOLVES IN THE  
NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAINS

January 9, 2008

Q. What does this revision do?

A. It allows states and tribes with approved wolf management plans and the people in those States more flexibility in managing nonessential experimental wolves.

Q. What made the Service decide to revise the 2005 rule?

A. In the 2005 rule, the Service inadvertently set an unobtainable threshold for allowing states and tribes to resolve conflicts between wolves and ungulate populations. Current information does not indicate that wolf predation alone is likely to be the primary cause of a reduction of any ungulate population in Montana, Idaho or Wyoming. In addition, there are no populations of wild ungulates in these three states where wolves are the sole predator. It is unlikely that wolf predation will impact ungulate population trends substantially unless other contributing factors are in operation, such as habitat quality and quantity, other predators, high harvest by hunters, weather and other factors. However, in combination with any of these other factors, wolf predation can have a substantial impact to some wild ungulate herds with the potential of reducing them below state and tribal herd management objectives. As wolf numbers have increased we also wanted to give people increased flexibility to protect their stock animals and dogs from wolf attack.

Q. What kind of flexibility in managing nonessential experimental wolves will this involve?

A. (1) Modify the definition of “unacceptable impact” to “impact to a wild ungulate population or herd where a State or Tribe has determined that wolves are one of the major causes of the population or herd not meeting State or Tribal population or herd management goals.” This definition expands the potential impacts for which wolf removal might be warranted beyond direct predation or those causing immediate population declines. It would, in certain circumstances, allow removal of wolves when they are a major cause of the inability of ungulate populations or herds to meet established State or Tribal population or herd management goals. Proposals for wolf control from a State or Tribe with a Service-approved wolf management plan would have to undergo both public and peer review prior to submitting the proposal to the Service for a final decision. A number of criteria, such as information showing that wolf control is warranted, are required in the proposal for wolf removal.

(2) Allow any legally present person on private or public land to lethally take a wolf that is in the act of attacking the individual's stock animal or dog, provided there is no evidence of intentional baiting, feeding, or deliberate attractants of wolves. Stock animals are defined as a horse, mule, donkey, llama or goat used to transport people or their possessions. The individual must be able to provide evidence that taken wolves were recently (less than 24 hours) in the act of attacking stock animals or dogs, and a Service-designated agent must be able to confirm that the wolves were in the act of attacking stock animals or dogs.

These modifications would not apply to States or Tribes without approved wolf management plans and would not impact wolves outside the Yellowstone or central Idaho nonessential experimental population areas or in the National Parks. An environmental assessment has been prepared on this action and is available at the same website:

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/>.

Q. What is a "stock animal"?

A. Stock animals are defined as a horse, mule, donkey, llama or goat used to transport people or their possessions.

Q. Does this revision change the nonessential experimental designation?

A. No, this revision does not change the nonessential experimental designation, but does contain additional special regulations that allow States and tribes with approved post-delisting wolf management plans more flexibility in managing nonessential experimental wolves. However, once wolves are delisted (removed from the list of endangered and threatened species) this rule is null and void, because a 10(j) special rule is applicable only to listed species.

Q. By allowing this revision to the 2005 special regulation for the central Idaho and Yellowstone Area Nonessential Experimental Populations of Gray Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains, is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerned about the continued recovery of the gray wolf?

A. Data indicates that the human-caused mortality rate in the adult-sized segment of the northern Rocky Mountain wolf population was nearly 26 percent per year from 1994 to 2006, and that the wolf population still continued to grow at about 24 percent annually. This data indicates that the current annual mortality rate of about 26 percent in the adult portion of the wolf population could be substantially increased and the wolf population could still maintain itself at current levels. This information and other factors of wolf behavior and population dynamics mean that wolf populations are quite resilient to human-caused mortality if it is regulated.

In addition, the wolf population now occupies most of the suitable wolf habitat in the northern Rocky Mountains and is unlikely to significantly expand its overall distribution beyond the outer boundaries of the current population because little unoccupied suitable habitat is available. Therefore, we do not expect wolf control to become necessary beyond a few instances.

Q. How many wolves have been legally killed by people in defense of their private property or by shoot-on-sight permits as authorized by either the 1994 or 2005 experimental population special rules?

A. Since 1995---60 wolves

Q. In the past 12 years, how many instances have there been of wolf depredations on stock animals that were accompanied by their owners?

A. Two wolves have been taken by Federal land permittees as wolves chased and harassed horses in corrals or on pickets and there have been a couple of other reports of stock animals being spooked by wolves.

Q. How many dogs have been confirmed to be killed by wolves from 1987 to 2007?

A. 101 dogs

Q. How many pet dogs have been killed by wolves while they were with their owners?

A. We are aware of couple reports of wolves killing dogs when humans were nearby.

Q. If wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains are delisted, how will that affect this revision?

A. This revision will no longer be valid as these wolves will no longer be managed under the ESA. A 10j rule only applies to listed species, so if wolves are delisted this rule is null and void.

Q. Is the revision to the 2005 special rule for wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains in effect once it is published in the Federal Register?

A. No. It doesn't go into effect until 30 days after publication in the Federal Register. This means that none of the actions identified in the revision can be implemented for 30 days.

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