



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Wolf Tracks

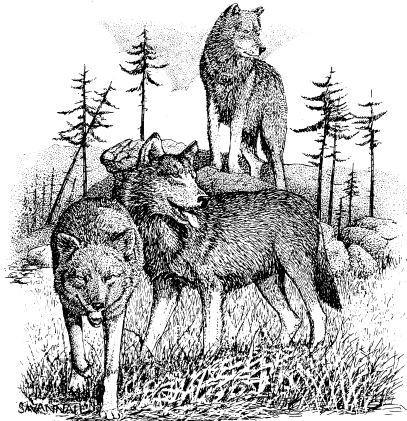
## *A Summary of Gray Wolf Activities and Issues*

February, 2001

### Introduction

This is the fifth issue of “Wolf Tracks”, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s update on gray wolf issues. This issue focuses on what is happening now that the comment period on the proposal to reclassify/delist wolves in portions of the United States has closed. If you have specific questions or know of someone who would like to receive “Wolf Tracks”, please contact our Gray Wolf Line at 612-713-7337 or at [graywolfmail@fws.gov](mailto:graywolfmail@fws.gov). Wolf Tracks is also available on the Web at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf>.

### So the comment period is over, what’s next?



“Thank you” to all who provided comments on our proposal to reclassify/delist gray wolves in portions of the United States. During the 4-month comment period, which closed on November 13, 2000, we received over 15,000 written comments, and hundreds of individuals provided oral testimony at 14 public hearings. Now that the comment period is over, we begin one of the most important steps in the proposal process: sorting, reading, and analyzing the many letters, faxes, e-mails and oral comments we received. These comments will be used in formulating a final decision. After we have made the final decision on this proposal it will be published in the Federal Register. We will make every effort to inform all of you of that decision by announcing it on our website, sending out news releases to the media, and sending out Wolf Tracks (with information about the decision) to everyone on our mailing list. Below are a few frequently asked questions about the rest of the decision-making process.

### Is it too late to submit my comments?

The comment period has officially closed, so we can no longer accept comments in any form. Because we received comments representing many different positions on the proposal, it is quite possible that your ideas and opinions have been expressed by others who commented.

## What's Next (Continued)

### Is there a way for members of the public to see the comments you received?

Copies of the comments and hearing transcripts are available for viewing, by appointment, at our Regional Offices in Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Fort Snelling, Minnesota; Hadley, Massachusetts; Atlanta, Georgia; and Arlington, Virginia.

### What will the Service do with the comments it received?

Public comments are an important factor in making our final decision on how to proceed with the proposed action. All substantive input received by the close of the comment period is considered in our decision-making process. Each person will not receive an individual reply to their comments, but the final Federal Register document will provide responses to significant and relevant issues raised by those who commented and will explain why suggested changes are, or are not, incorporated.

### On what will the Service base its final decision?

During a comment period, we may receive information from a wide variety of sources, including scientists from states, tribes, and academic institutions; people representing interest groups; other federal agencies; and the general public. We sometimes ask the public for input on specific issues to help with the decision-making process. When making a final decision on a proposal such as the one to reclassify/delist wolves, the Endangered Species Act requires that we base our decision on the best scientific information available. So, while we may receive many thousands of comments voicing a particular opinion, we must look for significant biological information contained in those comments, and use that information to make a decision. In particular, we are reviewing the comments for new scientific data, different interpretations of the data that we used, and evidence of additional threats or other new issues that we failed to consider in the proposal.

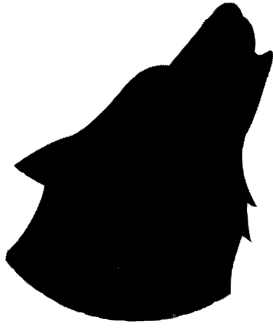


### Who makes the final decision?

Because the proposal included special regulations under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act, the final decision must be made by the Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

### Could the final decision be different from what was in the proposal?

In general, there are several possible outcomes for a proposed rule: it may be finalized as proposed, it may be finalized with modifications based on new information received during the comment period, or it may be completely withdrawn. Based on the information we receive during the comment period, certain components of a proposal may be changed while other aspects may stay the same.



At this point, because the Service is just beginning to analyze comments on the gray wolf reclassification/delisting proposal, we do not know what changes, if any, may be made. However, because of the complexity of the proposal it is likely that the final document will differ from the proposal.

**When will a final decision be made?**

We are working diligently with the intent to announce our final decision on gray wolf reclassification in July, 2001.

**When will the final decision become effective?**

Although final delisting/reclassification rules can go into effect the same day they are published in the Federal Register, they generally take effect 30 days after their publication. More complicated ones may not become effective until 60 or 90 days following publication. The final rule for this proposal is likely to follow a similar time frame.

**Peer Review of ESA Listing Actions**

The Endangered Species Act requires that all listing decisions be made solely on the basis of the best available scientific information. "All listing decisions" includes decisions to add species to or remove them from the threatened or endangered list, to reclassify species from endangered to threatened or vice versa, to designate or modify critical habitat, and to develop special regulations under section 4(d). Historically, to ensure that we used the best available scientific information, we sent our listing proposals to experts on the species and to individuals knowledgeable about threats to the species and asked for their review and comments.

Then, in 1994, that practice became policy. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service formally underscored our commitment to use the best available scientific data and expert review by jointly finalizing a policy for peer review of endangered species listing and recovery planning actions. That policy (available at <http://endangered.fws.gov/policy/pol003.html>) requires that we (1) solicit comments from at least three independent specialists, (2) use their input in our final decision, (3) summarize their input in the final rule, and (4) make their reports, opinions, and data available as part of the administrative record of the final decision.

As we drafted the July 2000 wolf proposal we sought out potential peer reviewers and asked them to provide comments on the proposal. To ensure that they would be "independent" experts as required by the 1994 policy we did not solicit peer

**Peer Review  
(Continued)**

reviews from FWS employees, we avoided individuals who clearly stood to gain or lose from our final decision, and we did not select anyone employed by a state agency that has an important stake in the outcome of this proposal.

Due to the complexity of the proposal, and its extensive geographic coverage, we wanted to do more than is required by the policy. We ultimately obtained peer review comments from 11 individual scientists. Nearly all of these reviewers have a great deal of “in the field” wolf experience in the Lower 48 States. The group includes government biologists who study wolves in Alaska and Canada, a wolf pathologist, a USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services wolf depredation control agent, and several university faculty members who have spent many years researching wolves. During the public comment period, this group of peer reviewers provided us with an extensive set of independent, constructive comments that will be carefully reviewed and used as we come to a final decision on the proposal. As required, we will summarize their comments in the final rule and make them available as part of the administrative record.

**Public Meetings & Hearings:  
Getting the Word Out  
and Comments In**

Exchange of information - telling people about the wolf proposal and receiving their input - is one of the key steps in the process to reclassify/delist gray wolves in portions of the United States. Getting the word out to people about the reclassification proposal was a critical step, and we attempted to meet that challenge in a number of ways. We established the wolf website, issued periodic updates through “Wolf Tracks,” published notices and news releases, and sponsored information meetings. These meetings were intended to present the facts about the proposed reclassification early on in the comment period so that individuals and groups could learn about and understand the proposal before they provided their comments to us.

Nationwide, we held dozens of these informal, information sessions in areas of the country that could be affected by a change in the wolf’s status. The meetings provided an opportunity for the public to read wolf information, view a slide show and display, study maps, and ask questions of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representatives. The sessions were not intended as venues to obtain public input, but those attending were provided with a wealth of information on which to base their comments. In addition, biologists in regions across the country provided information directly to a variety of audiences by presenting information to conservation organizations and other groups interested in wolf recovery.

Although the structured information meetings were not heavily attended, those who did come represented a diverse range of interests. Members of interest groups - conservation and agricultural interests - accounted for a large portion of those attending. At some meetings, members of tribes and representatives of state resource agencies joined us in providing information to the public.

The second part of the information exchange process focused on receiving input from the public about the wolf proposal. We accepted input for 4 months, either by written comment, e-mail, fax, or oral comments presented at public hearings. We held 14 public hearings across the country during the comment period; about 900 people attended and more than 300 provided oral comments. During these hearings, individuals presented their opinions and ideas to a hearing officer, court reporter, and Service representatives.

Although the hearings were intended to collect input on our proposal to reclassify some wolf populations, many of those who spoke at hearings gave their ideas about a wide range of wolf issues. Again, many interests and interest groups were represented, as well as members of the public, local, state, and Federal officials, and tribes. Some thought there were too many wolves in some areas, some thought there were too few. Some believed wolves needed more protection; others believed more flexibility was needed in managing wolf populations. Many stated that wolves should be delisted immediately in some areas, and others thought wolves should always be protected by the Endangered Species Act. While these comments were helpful in evaluating the public's perception of the Service's current wolf programs, many did not address the proposal itself - changing the wolf's status from endangered to threatened in some parts of its range and delisting it in some regions not currently inhabited by wolves.



Many people, though, did address the proposal. Some supported the proposal to reclassify; others believed wolves should remain endangered. Many people expressed opinions on our proposed "DPS" or distinct population segment boundaries. In particular, concern was expressed about the Western DPS, the inclusion of states such as Washington and Oregon in that DPS, and the possibility that one or more additional DPSs might be warranted. Many people were concerned that California and Nevada were not included in the Western DPS but instead wolves in those states would be delisted.

Some people told us that wolves should not be delisted in areas where they do not occur, expressing concern that such an action might preclude future recovery efforts. In the Northeast, where

## Hearings and Meetings (Continued)

the proposal recommends reclassifying wolves from endangered to threatened, commenters raised questions about reclassifying wolves where they do not currently exist. They also voiced opinions about possible reintroduction – and accompanying costs and restrictions – as well as concerns about wolf control and introduction of a predator species.

As with comments submitted by mail, e-mail and fax, the comments offered at public hearings will be analyzed and become part of the public record. We will use this input, along with other data and relevant information, in developing a final rule on our proposed action.

## “Recovery”, “Delisting”, “Reclassification”--What Do These Terms Mean?

*Recovery* is the goal of the Endangered Species Act. Recovery is a process of management and protection of a species so that its population(s) can increase and expand and/or the factors threatening it have been significantly reduced. When a species has been “recovered” it means that the species’ population is strong enough that protection under the Endangered Species Act is no longer needed.

*Delisting* is taking a species off the list of threatened and endangered species when the population has recovered. Delisting is a formal rulemaking process that requires publication of a proposal to delist in the *Federal Register*, followed by a public comment period. The information received during the public comment period is reviewed and a decision is made whether to delist, and the decision is published in the *Federal Register*. Species are also delisted if they become extinct or were originally listed in error.

*Reclassification* is a process of changing the status of a listed species from endangered to threatened or vice versa. It is a formal rulemaking process that requires that a proposal to reclassify be published in the *Federal Register* followed by a public comment period. Information received during the public comment period is then evaluated and a determination on whether to reclassify is made and published.

## What is the status of a Minnesota wolf management plan?

At this time Minnesota does not have a wolf management plan. In May of 2000 the Minnesota Legislature passed a law that describes the State protections that will begin after the wolf is no longer Federally protected. Many news reports mistakenly referred to this legislation as a “wolf management plan,” but it is not a plan. This law changes existing State statutes to give the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) the authority

necessary to manage gray wolves, specifies how wolves may be legally taken in Minnesota after Federal protection is removed, and requires the DNR to develop a wolf management plan. It does not include any wolf population goals, habitat protection features, or population or health monitoring requirements; these are expected to be in the wolf management plan the Minnesota DNR is now preparing. Most of the provisions of the Minnesota law cannot be implemented by the State until after Federal delisting of the gray wolf is completed.

When the DNR completes a wolf management plan we will review it to determine if it ensures the continued existence of Minnesota's gray wolf population into the foreseeable future. Our review will focus on an analysis of the biological effects of the methods that the state of Minnesota proposes to use for wolf management. We will not address social concerns about the methods that the state chooses to use. If the Minnesota DNR's plan provides for a continued viable population in Minnesota, we expect to prepare a proposal to delist the gray wolf in the western (and adjacent) Great Lakes states.

## Mexican Gray Wolf Update

Since the Mexican wolf reintroduction began on January 26, 1998, 56 Mexican gray wolves have been released into the wild in New Mexico and Arizona. Of these, 22 currently remain free-ranging. These 22 wolves comprise 6 packs: the Campbell Blue pack (2 adults), the Hawk's nest pack (an adult female, 2 yearlings, and 1 pup), the Cienega pack (2 adults and 2 yearlings), the Francisco pack (2 adults, 2 yearlings and 4 pups), the Mule pack (2 adults), and the Pipestem pack (an adult female and a female yearling). Events of the recent months are summarized below.



- The eight members of the Francisco pack were released into the wild in Arizona on July 14, 2000. They began exploring their new surroundings and proved themselves successful at hunting wild elk. On December 18, one of the yearlings was found dead near Aragon, New Mexico. The cause of death is being investigated.
- This summer, the Pipestem pack was repeatedly visiting the area around Gila Hot Springs. Biologists tried to discourage the pack from returning to this populated area, and eventually captured the male and returned him to captivity with the hopes that the remaining pack members would move elsewhere. The remaining females have recently been observed with the male from the Mule pack.
- In November, the adult male of the Hawk's Nest pack was euthanized. He was suffering from a brain tumor and brain infection. This wolf was one of the two males that

## Mexican Wolf (Continued)

were part of the original release in 1998, and was very successful in the wild.

- A juvenile female of the Campbell Blue pack was hit and killed by a car in October.
- On October 20, 2000, James Rogers was sentenced for killing a Mexican wolf in 1998. He admitted to killing the wolf, failing to report the shooting, and transporting the wolf's body across state lines. He received 4 months in prison, 6 months house arrest, and 50 hours of community service.
- A group of 6 wolves was released on January 11, 2001, just below the Mogollon Rim in Arizona. The pack consists of an alpha pair and 4 pups (2 male, 2 female). These are the first cross lineage pups from the Aragon lineage (in Mexico) released into the wild and will introduce important new genetic diversity.

## Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf Update

Gray wolves in the U.S. Rocky Mountain region are doing well. Their numbers continue to increase, and new packs are forming and establishing new territories. Despite this increase, the year 2000 will not be the first year of the 3-year count down to recovery, as we had hoped. Because of legal wolf control, suspected illegal killing, and the loss of pups this summer (likely because of disease), wolf numbers in the area did not increase to the level we had estimated.

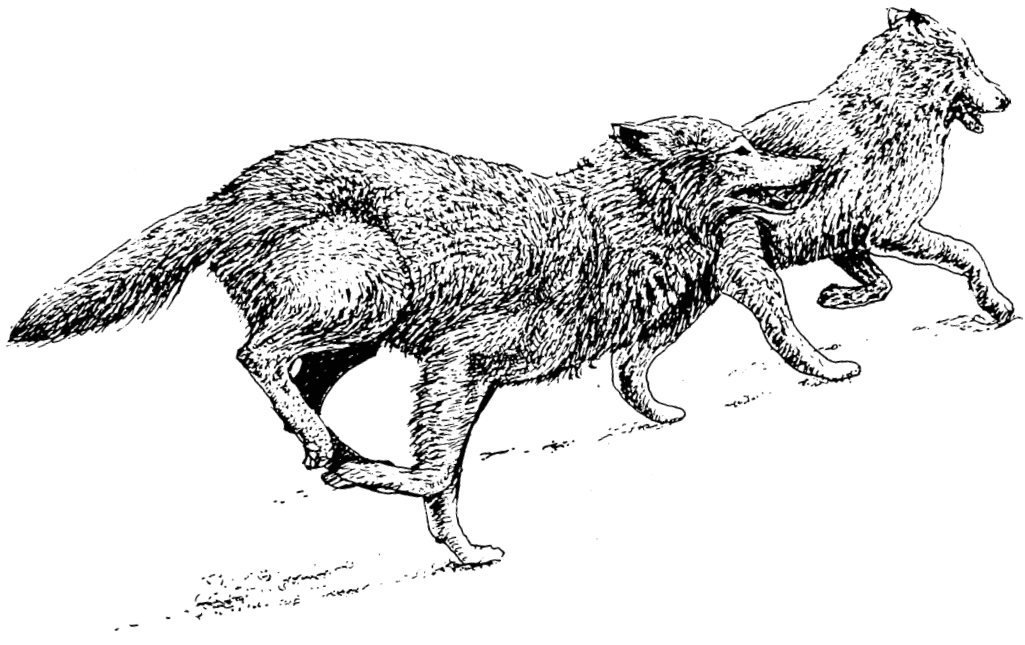
Preliminary numbers indicate that there are an estimated 63 wolves in up to 12 groups with at least 5 breeding pairs in north-western Montana. In the Greater Yellowstone area there are about 164 wolves in 16 groups with at least 11 breeding pairs, and central Idaho has approximately 185 wolves in 17 groups with at least 9 breeding pairs. Wolves are also beginning to range outside of these three areas -- last year, wolves were observed in western Oregon. A map of the new pack home ranges will be published in February, and will be available on the internet at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/wolf/>.

As wolf populations keep growing, it gets increasingly difficult to estimate their numbers and to keep track of their range. This winter, we, in cooperation with the National Park Service and Nez Perce Tribal biologists, will increase efforts to radio-collar and monitor wolf packs in the three western states. With more wolves collared, we will have a better understanding of where new packs are located and, therefore, will be able to get more accurate population counts.



**Quick Wolf Facts!**

- Wolves live in groups called *packs*, an extended family unit that usually consists of a set of parents (alpha pair), their offspring and other non-breeding adults.
- Pack sizes vary considerably, depending on the size of the wolf population in the area and the amount of food available. In the Western Great Lakes, average pack size varies from four to eight during winter with records up to 16. Pack sizes can be as large as 30 or more in parts of Canada and Alaska.
- Gray wolves are known to live up to 13 years in the wild and 15 years in captivity.
- In the Great Lakes region, each wolf eats an average of 15 to 19 deer a year in addition to beaver and other prey.
- Although they trot along at 5 miles per hour, wolves can attain speeds as high as 45 miles per hour.
- Wolves may not eat for a week or longer but are capable of eating 20 pounds of meat in a single meal.
- The gray wolf is equally at home in the deserts of Israel, the deciduous forests of Wisconsin, and the frozen Arctic of Siberia. Within North America, gray wolves formerly ranged from coast to coast and inhabited almost all habitat types; prairie, forest, mountains, and wetlands.



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