



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wolf Tracks

A Summary of Gray Wolf Activities and Issues

January, 2002

Introduction

This is the sixth issue of “Wolf Tracks”, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s update on gray wolf issues. This issue focuses on the status of the gray wolf reclassification/delisting proposal and updates on wolf recovery actions across the country. For more information on “Wolf Tracks”, please contact our Gray Wolf Line at 612-713-7337 or at graywolfmail@fws.gov. Wolf Tracks is also available on the Web at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf>.

Status of the Gray Wolf Reclassification/Delisting Proposal



Our July 13, 2000, proposal to change the status of the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act (Act) generated thousands of comments. Some of those comments raised significant issues, and have resulted in internal discussions on potential alternative actions that we could take. Included in those discussions are the issues of how many gray wolf distinct population segments (DPS) and/or recovery programs are necessary to meet the requirements of the Act, where the DPS boundaries should be, and in what states, if any, should gray wolves be delisted at this time. We are still discussing those issues with the result that our final decision is likely to differ from the original proposed actions. We anticipate that a final decision on the July 13, 2000, proposal will be made during Spring/Summer of 2002. When this final decision is made, it will be publicized in a number of ways, including press releases, e-mail notices to those on our wolf e-mailing list, and detailed information on our Web site: <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf>.

Minnesota Wolf Management Plan

In May 2000, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law that describes the State protections that will begin after the wolf is no longer federally protected. This law gives the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) the authority 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. In response to this law, the DNR completed the Minnesota Wolf Management Plan (Plan) in February, 2001. The Plan incorporates many of the recommendations of the Gray Wolf Roundtable citizens group that the DNR convened in 1998. Under the Plan, two wolf management zones would be established in the state.

Minnesota Wolf Management Plan (continued)

Zone A is roughly the northeastern one-third of the state, and is composed of Wolf Management Zones 1-4 described in the 1992, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Plan for the Eastern Timber Wolf. About 85 percent of Minnesota's wolves live in Zone A. Zone B is the rest of the state, and is Federal Wolf Management Zone 5.

Under the Minnesota Plan anyone would be allowed to kill or injure a wolf in defense of human life, just as can be done now while wolves remain protected by the Act. The Plan would allow wolves to be harassed, but not killed or injured, if they are within 500 yards of people, buildings, or domestic animals. This non-injurious harassment would be allowed in both wolf management zones. Statewide, owners of domestic animals would also be allowed to kill wolves if the wolf is in the act of stalking, attacking, or killing the domestic animal. In the case of a wolf attacking a pet, the pet must have been under the supervision of the owner, not free-roaming, in order for this provision to apply.

In both zones, the DNR can open "depredation control areas" where wolf depredation on domestic animals is a verified problem. These areas would extend outward for one mile from a verified depredation site. The triggers for opening the depredation control areas, and the duration of the resulting depredation control actions by state-certified predator controllers, vary between the two zones. In Zone A depredation control areas can be opened only for 60 days immediately following a depredation incident. In Zone B they can be opened annually for up to 214 days if there was a verified wolf depredation anytime within the previous 5 years.

Finally, in Zone B wolves can be taken by a landowner (or by the owner's agent) on his/her land at any time to protect domestic animals. The wolf does not have to represent an immediate threat to domestic animals or humans prior to being killed under this provision of the Plan. Additionally, a State-certified predator controller can be hired to trap wolves at other locations within one mile of such lands, with the permission of the landowner.

The Plan also establishes additional state penalties for illegal wolf killing, enacts a 5-year delay on public hunting or trapping seasons, and establishes a minimum population goal of 1,600 wolves. State compensation for livestock killed by wolves was increased (effective in July of 2001) to the full market value of the animals. The plan also calls for a statewide estimate of wolf numbers in the first and fifth years after Federal delisting. Subsequent to delisting, similar estimates would be made every 5 years.





The Service is evaluating the DNR Plan to determine if it will ensure the long-term survival of wolves in Minnesota. As part of the Service's evaluation we have asked the Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Team to review the Plan. They are compiling comments and recommendations to provide to us and the DNR. The DNR developed this management plan in preparation for Federal delisting, but it will not be implemented until after the gray wolf is removed from the protections of the Act (wolves are currently listed as federally threatened in Minnesota). If the Plan is found to assure the long-term viability of wolves in the state, all of the recovery criteria from the Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Plan will have been met. At that point, we expect to prepare a proposal to delist the gray wolf in the western (and adjacent) Great Lakes states.

For more information on the Minnesota Wolf Management Plan, visit the DNR's website at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/> or call 888-MINNDNR. A copy of the complete Plan and our summary are available at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf/wgl/mn-plnsum.htm> or by calling the Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337.

How Many Wild Wolves Are There in Each State?

Eastern Gray Wolf (Based on 2000-2001 winter surveys)	
<i>Michigan - Upper Peninsula</i>	249
<i>- Isle Royale</i>	19
<i>Wisconsin</i>	251
<i>Minnesota</i>	2,445 *
*1998 estimate; MN does not conduct an annual survey.	
Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf	
<i>Northwestern Montana</i>	63 (6 breeding packs)
Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf - Experimental Populations	
<i>Central Idaho</i>	192 (10 breeding packs)
<i>Yellowstone (Idaho/Wyoming/Montana)</i>	177 (14 breeding packs)
Mexican Gray Wolf	
<i>Arizona and New Mexico</i>	25 ** (+ unknown # of pups)

** Since the reintroduction began in 1998, approximately 65 wolves have been released. Some of these have died or been killed and others have been returned to captivity.

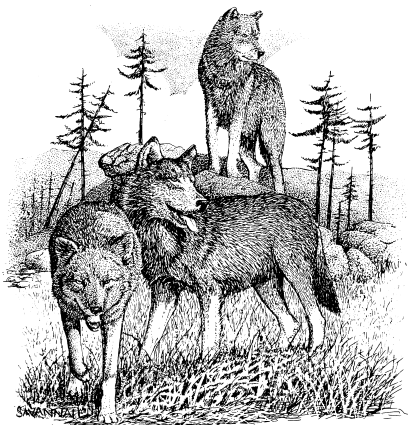
Rocky Mountain Wolf Update

The year 2001, will almost certainly be the second year of the three-year count down to wolf recovery in the Rocky Mountains. The Service believes that 30 breeding pairs of wolves, with an equitable and uniform distribution throughout the three states for three successive years would constitute a viable and recovered wolf population. The Nez Perce tribe recently confirmed that the Gold Fork pack, located in Idaho, contains at least 2 yearlings, verifying that the 30 breeding pair recovery goal was first met in 2000.

If the wolf population remains at or above 30 breeding pairs in 2001 and 2002, the numerical recovery goal will be met on December 31, 2002. If, at that time, the other provisions required for delisting are met, primarily the development of state wolf management plans that would reasonably assure that the gray wolf would not become threatened or endangered again, we would propose delisting the Rocky Mountain population. The delisting process, including extensive public involvement, could be proposed as soon as 2003.

The Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery 2000 Annual Report is available on-line at <http://www.r6.fws.gov/wolf/annualrpt00/> or by contacting the Helena, Montana office (406-449-5225). The annual report, a cooperative effort by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nez Perce Tribe, the National Park Service, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, presents information on the status, distribution, and management of the recovering Rocky Mountain wolf population from January 1, 2000, through December 31, 2000. The 2001 Annual Report is expected to be completed in January, 2002.

Wolf Awareness Week

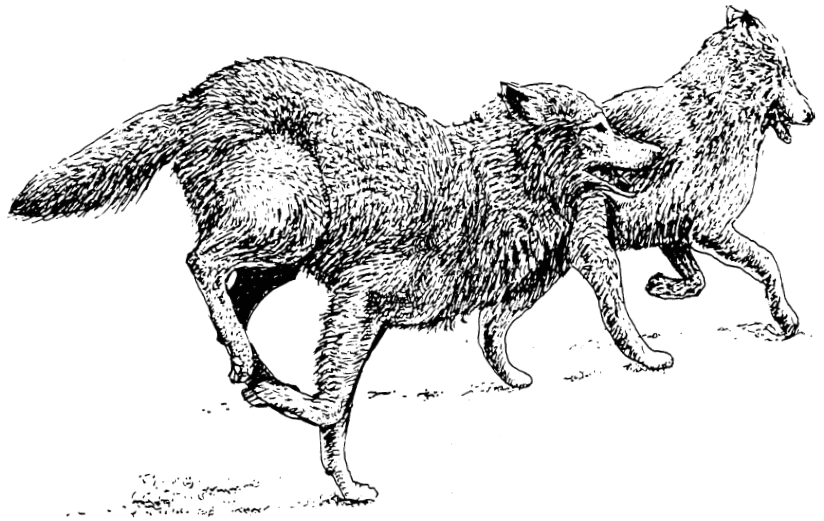


October 14-20, 2001, was Wolf Awareness Week, a nationwide wolf celebration that, since 1990, has been held the third week in October. During this week, organizations such as schools, libraries, and nature centers focus their attentions on wolf conservation issues. As part of Wolf Awareness Week, the Timber Wolf Alliance produces a Wolf Awareness poster and kid's newspaper with information on wolf biology, the status of wolves throughout the United States, and discussions of the myths and realities of wolf stories. These materials are still available, and educators who are interested in receiving these materials for their classroom can request them by calling the Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337 or by e-mailing graywolfmail@fws.gov.

Restoring Wolves to the Northern Forest

As part of National Wolf Awareness Week, the National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) Northeast office launched an extensive educational outreach effort on wolf recovery in the northeastern United States. In cooperation with Mission:Wolf, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing refuge for ex-pet wolves and wolf-dog hybrids, NWF hosted programs in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The more than 300 people attending each event were treated to a showing of the large format film "Wolves" and the chance to meet Rami, an "ambassador wolf."

The week culminated with a two day conference, *Restoring Wolves to the Northern Forest*. The conference, cosponsored by the Natural Resources Council of Maine, the New Hampshire Wildlife Federation, and the Vermont Natural Resources Council, featured national experts on wolf recovery, genetics, and the social and political issues surrounding this controversial topic. Nearly 200 people listened to presentations on topics including the ecological niche of wolves in the northern forest, wolf-elk interaction in Yellowstone National Park, the status of wolf recovery, and the use of citizen groups in recovering predatory species.



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