



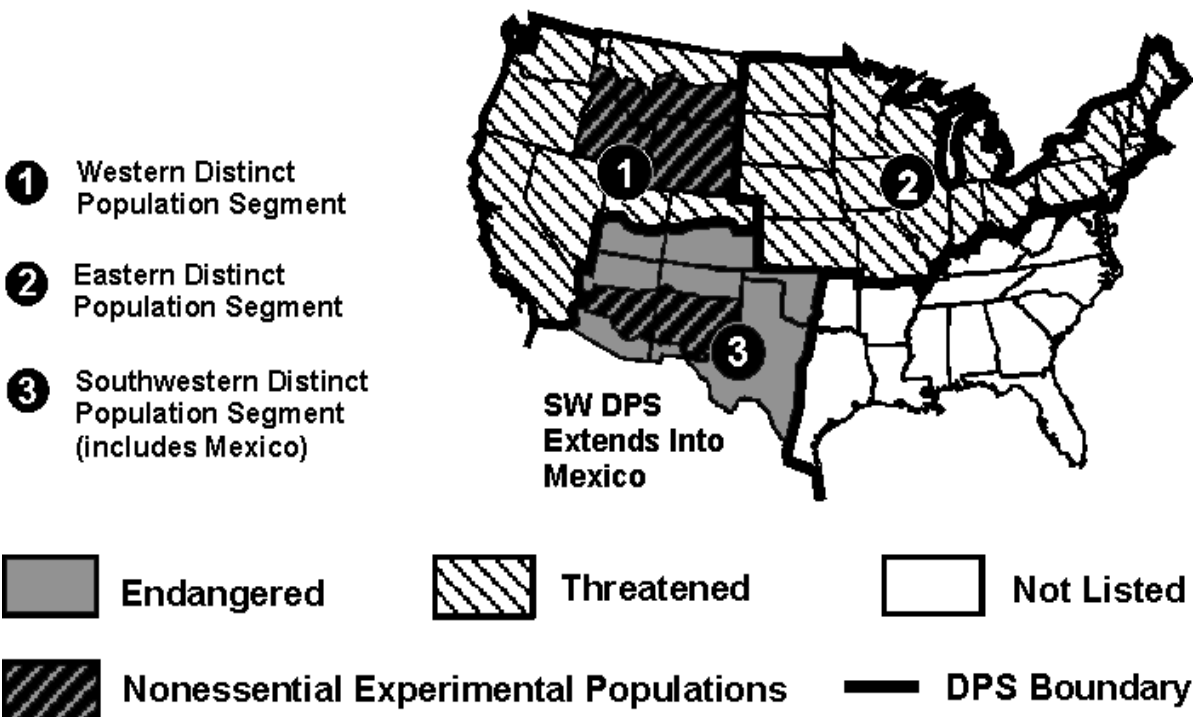
Questions and Answers About The Final Rule to Reclassify/Delist the Gray Wolf

1) What changes were made to the status of the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act?

We (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) changed the classification of the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act from endangered to threatened in portions of the lower 48 states. We also removed the gray wolf from the list of endangered and threatened species in areas of the country that are outside the gray wolf's historical range. We made these changes because gray wolves have successfully increased their numbers and range to such an extent that the "endangered" classification is no longer appropriate in most of their range. Also, gray wolves were incorrectly listed as endangered in the southeastern U.S. The species never occurred in those states, so we removed Endangered Species Act protections in those areas.

We also established three "Distinct Population Segments" (DPS) for the gray wolf that encompass the entire historical range of the gray wolf in the lower 48 states and Mexico. The DPSs correspond to the three areas of the country where there are wolf populations and ongoing recovery activities. Gray wolves in the Eastern DPS and the Western DPS were reclassified from endangered to threatened, except where wolves were already classified as threatened or designated as an experimental population. There are three experimental populations of gray wolves that were designated before this rule, and those experimental population designations remain in place. The Southwestern DPS retains its endangered status.

Status of the Gray Wolf in the Continental U.S.



We established two new special section 4(d) rules for wolves in the Western DPS and portions of the Eastern DPS. These special rules allow for lethal control of wolves that depredate on livestock and pets.

For more information on these changes, see the “Summary of the 2003 Reclassification of the Gray Wolf” fact sheet.

2) What is a Distinct Population Segment?

The Endangered Species Act allows the listing and delisting of species, subspecies, and distinct population segments of vertebrate animals. A Distinct Population Segment, or DPS, is a significant population that occurs in a distinct portion of a species’ or subspecies’ range. The DPS is usually described geographically, such as “all members of XYZ species north of 40 degrees north latitude.”

Our final rule that reclassified most gray wolf populations in the lower 48 states also changed the way that the gray wolf is listed under the Endangered Species Act. In 1978, the gray wolf was listed as endangered throughout all 48 states, except Minnesota where it was listed as threatened. Now, however, the Service has identified three Distinct Population Segments -- the Eastern DPS, Western DPS, and Southwestern DPS -- of the gray wolf in the United States and Mexico.

Each of the DPSs encompasses a core area where wolf recovery is underway. The Eastern DPS includes states in the historical range of the gray wolf from the Great Plains to the Atlantic coast. Due to successful wolf recovery efforts in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, wolves in this DPS are now classified as threatened instead of endangered.

The Western DPS includes the northern U.S. Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coastal states. We reclassified wolves from endangered to threatened in this region because of the successful reintroduction of gray wolves in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho, along with natural recovery in Montana.

The Southwestern DPS includes Arizona, New Mexico, southern Utah and southern Colorado, western Texas, western Oklahoma, and Mexico. Gray wolves in the Southwestern DPS retain their endangered status, and the nonessential experimental population area in Arizona, New Mexico, and a small portion of Texas remains in place.

3) What is a 4(d) rule and how will these rules affect gray wolves?

Section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act allows us to establish special regulations to change the normal protections for threatened (not endangered) species, subspecies, or distinct population segments. Usually, 4(d) rules allow flexibility in managing threatened species, which is important when there are conflicts between people and those species. Section 4(d) rules can be used to reduce conflicts between individual wolves and people who own domestic animals, while allowing overall wolf populations to continue to increase.

The Western DPS 4(d) rule is similar to the regulations already in place for the Yellowstone and central Idaho nonessential experimental populations, where wolves were reintroduced in the mid-1990s. The 4(d) rule provides a variety of options to people who experience problems with wolves that prey on domestic animals.

In the Eastern DPS, the 4(d) rule applies to states that are west of Pennsylvania, except Minnesota. Here, designated Federal, state, and tribal employees can kill wolves that have attacked or killed domestic animals. This rule is similar to regulations in place in Minnesota since 1978. The 4(d) rule also allows tribes to salvage dead wolves on reservations for cultural uses without a Federal permit.

4) What changes were made for wolves in the Eastern Distinct Population Segment?

This Distinct Population Segment includes Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan - where wolf populations are now well-established – as well as North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine - where there are no known wolf populations. The status of gray wolves in those states changed from endangered to threatened (except in Minnesota, where gray wolves were already listed as threatened). Threatened is a less serious classification under the Endangered Species Act; in the case of the gray wolf, it indicates that significant progress is being made toward recovery in the DPS. The 4(d) rule now in place applies to states in this DPS that are west of Pennsylvania, and excluding Minnesota. The new 4(d) rule now allows authorized employees of state or tribal conservation agencies or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to kill or capture wolves that have attacked or killed domestic animals, if repeated problems are likely. The rule also allows tribes to salvage dead wolves on reservations for cultural uses without a Federal permit. The new 4(d) rule is very similar to existing special regulations in effect in Minnesota.

5) What changes were made for wolves in the Western Distinct Population Segment?

This Distinct Population Segment includes wolves in the core population in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, plus Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, northern Utah, and northern Colorado. The status of gray wolves in these states changed from endangered to threatened, a less serious classification under the ESA. The “non-essential experimental population” designation in place for reintroduced wolves in Yellowstone and central Idaho remains in place. A new 4(d) rule is now in place for wolves outside the non-essential experimental population areas within the Western DPS. Similar to the provisions for the non-essential experimental population, the 4(d) rule provides a variety of methods to control problem wolves that come into conflict with livestock production activities on private and public land.

6) What changes were made for wolves in the Southwestern Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment?

The Service’s recent actions did not change the status of gray wolves in the Southwestern DPS; they continue to be classified as endangered. The “non-essential experimental population” area in central New Mexico and Arizona and a small portion of west Texas also remains in place.

7) What is the status of gray wolves in states outside the historical range of the gray wolf?

States outside the three DPSs are outside the historical range of the gray wolf in the lower 48 states. Because gray wolves did not historically live in these states, we delisted wolves outside these areas, removing them from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species.

8) How did the Service make its final decision to change the gray wolf’s status?

When we proposed to change the gray wolf’s legal status in 2000, we held a series of public information meetings, as well as 14 public hearings throughout the country. During the 120-day public comment period, the Service received about 17,000 unique comments on the proposal to change the wolf’s status. We examined all public comments, evaluated current information

about the status of the gray wolf, and then made the decision to reclassify gray wolves in much of the lower 48 states from endangered to threatened with modifications to the original proposal in response to our analysis of the public comments.

9) How does the Service's final rule differ from the rule proposed in 2000?

In finalizing the rule, we changed the boundaries of the proposed Distinct Population Segments to better represent historical gray wolf range in the lower 48 states. Therefore, the states of California and Nevada were added to the Western DPS. In the east, we included all states within historical gray wolf range, and combined the Western Great Lakes and Northeastern DPSs into one DPS. Additionally, the southern boundary between the Western DPS and the Southwestern DPS was shifted northward to better represent the most likely movements of dispersing wolves in these two regions.

10) In its final rule, why did the Service combine the proposed DPSs for the Western Great Lakes and the Northeast?

When we developed our July 2000 reclassification proposal, we had some evidence that wolves still lived in the Northeast in very low numbers, and that those wolves might be genetically different from the other gray wolves benefitting from our recovery programs in the Midwest, Northern Rockies, and Southwest. Therefore, we believed the Northeast met the criteria for a Distinct Population Segment listing, and that gray wolf recovery in the Northeast would be necessary to achieve the goal of the ESA. However, since our proposal was published we have not received any further evidence that confirms the existence of individual gray wolves in the Northeast, and there appears to be no evidence supporting the existence of a gray wolf population there. We cannot designate a Distinct Population Segment where there is no gray wolf population.

11) What wolf recovery efforts will be made in other parts of a DPS outside core recovery areas -- a region such as Colorado or the northeastern United States, for example?

While each DPS corresponds to a core wolf recovery area, the DPS boundaries include all areas where wolves once occurred. Approved recovery plans call for restoration of wolf populations to a point that they no longer need protection of the Endangered Species Act; the ESA does not require, nor do these plans call for restoring wolves to their entire former range or to all remaining suitable habitat. Thus, the recovery plan for the wolves in the eastern U.S. specifies that wolves must be recovered in Minnesota and in one other place in its historical range in the East. This second population now exists in Wisconsin and Michigan. Once those recovery goals are met, the gray wolf will be considered recovered in the eastern United States even if the species does not occupy its entire former range. Similarly in the West, once recovery goals have been met in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, wolves in the Western DPS will be considered recovered. At this time we are not planning to initiate additional gray wolf recovery programs or geographically expand the area included in any of our three existing gray wolf recovery programs.

12) What would be the status of wolves that might at some time occur in a state outside the three DPSs?

It is highly unlikely that wild gray wolves will show up outside one of the DPSs because these listed areas are quite large and those wolves would have moved outside their historical range. In the unlikely event that a gray wolf does wander outside one of the DPSs, wild gray wolves

would not be protected by the ESA. However, they may be protected by state or tribal laws or regulations. Regardless of their location, captive gray wolves will remain protected by the ESA if they, or their ancestors, were removed from the wild in one of the listed DPSs.

13) When does the Service anticipate gray wolf recovery and delisting in the lower 48 states?

Now that the Service has finalized the reclassification of gray wolves in areas where they are no longer endangered, we can begin the review and evaluation process to delist wolves – taking them off the list of endangered and threatened species – if appropriate. Such a step is possible when wolf numbers reach numerical goals and when states with core wolf populations provide adequate assurances that those populations will be protected after the ESA’s protections are removed. In the Eastern DPS, wolf numbers have reached and exceeded recovery goals, and the Service has received and approved state wolf management plans from Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. In the Western DPS, numerical recovery goals were achieved in 2002 and state management plans are being developed.

14) When does the final reclassification decision become effective?

The reclassification and the associated special regulations for the Eastern and Western DPSs are effective immediately upon publication in the *Federal Register*. Because we are not increasing Federal protections or regulatory oversight, there is no need to provide time for the public and government agencies to come into compliance with any changes. The immediate application of the reclassification also makes it easier for individuals to deal with wolf-livestock conflicts.

15) Where can I get more information?

The Federal Register publication of the final reclassification of the gray wolf, as well as information about gray wolf populations, is available on the Internet at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf>.

Individuals or groups wishing to be placed on the Service’s mailing list to obtain updates on the wolf’s status can write to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Gray Wolf Review
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

or use the GRAYWOLFMAIL@FWS.GOV address or call the Service’s Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337.