



ADDRESS ONLY THE DIRECTOR,
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

Mr. M. Jeff Hagener, Director
Montana Department of Fish,
Wildlife, and Parks
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, Montana 59620-0701

Dear Director ^{Jeff} Hagener:

The gray wolf population in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming has met recovery goals and the Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to pursuing a proposal to delist the species. As you know, the Service's responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act include ensuring that adequate management controls are in place to maintain population levels above recovery goals.

Based on our review of state management plans, peer review comments, and the states' responses to those comments, the Service is confident that both the Montana and Idaho wolf management plans are adequate to maintain their share of the tri-state wolf population above recovery levels. Consequently, Montana is not required to take any additional action in order for the Service to proceed with a delisting proposal.

As you are aware, the Service must consider the three state management plans in their totality because the wolf populations of the three states comprise the Western Distinct Population Segment, the listed entity in question. As a result, delisting cannot be proposed at this time due to some significant concerns about portions of Wyoming's state law and wolf management plan. The Service has provided Wyoming with these concerns and specific steps to resolve them. Once Wyoming adequately addresses these concerns, the Service intends to proceed with a proposed delisting process for the gray wolf in the Western Distinct Population Segment.

In the interim, I hope that Montana will continue to work with Service biologists to prepare a proposal to delist wolves when adequate management plans are approved. During that process, the Service and states should discuss opportunities to ensure that adequate funds are available to accomplish the necessary monitoring and management of wolf populations. The non-essential experimental population rule (Section 10(j)) and the Section 4(d) rule for threatened wolves in northwestern Montana offer expanded management flexibility to any state with an approved state wolf management plan. The Service has been discussing ways to transfer some of the expanded

authority for wolf management in Montana to Fish, Wildlife and Parks under a cooperative agreement with the Service. I hope those discussions will continue and the State will consider assuming some of those wolf management authorities even before the delisting process is completed.

Thank you for all your cooperation and please let me know if I can provide further assistance. I want to congratulate your staff for the professional approach your Department exhibited during preparation of the state plan.

Sincerely,



DIRECTOR

cc: Idaho Department of Game and Fish
Wyoming Game and Fish Department