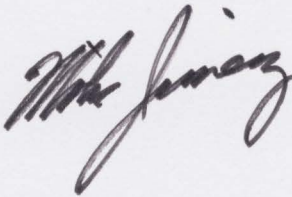


MEMO TO FILE

From: Mike Jimenez, USFWS



Date: 2/22/13

Subject: Review passage of Wyoming Senate File 132 and Montana House Bill 73.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 2009 delisting rule for the Northern Rocky Mountain (NRM) Distinct Population Segment stated that we would initiate a status review and analysis of threats if changes in State law or management regulations threatened any portion of the NRM wolf population. On August 24, 2011, the USFWS determined that changes in Idaho's 2011-2012 wolf hunting regulations did not represent a significant threat to the Idaho wolf population and therefore a full status review was not warranted (Cooley 2011). On November 19, 2012, the USFWS concluded that changes in Montana's 2012-2013 Wolf Hunting Regulations did not present significant threats to the Montana wolf population, thus a full status review was not initiated (Sartorius 2012).

In February 2013, Wyoming and Montana enacted laws that affect wolf hunting in their respective states. We reviewed these laws and determined that they do not pose a significant threat to the Wyoming and Montana portions of the NRM wolf population.

Wyoming

The Governor of Wyoming signed Senate File 132 into law which allows the use of silencers for hunting all wildlife species classified as trophy game animals, including black bears, mountain lions, elk, deer, moose, and wolves. It is unlikely that the use of silencers will pose a significant threat to the Wyoming wolf population. All other regulations related to wolf harvest remain unchanged.

- Wyoming established a permanent trophy game management area (TGMA) in northwestern Wyoming, where wolves are classified and managed as trophy game animals by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD).
- Based on 2011 population estimates, 86% of the Wyoming wolf population lives within the trophy game area, Yellowstone National Park, and the Wind River Indian Reservation.
- The TGMA is divided into 12 hunting units with predetermined quotas established for each unit. Once quotas are reached, the hunt unit is closed to further wolf hunting. If quotas are not reached, the area remains open until the date specified in the regulations.
- The bag limit is one wolf per hunter during any one calendar year and hunters must report to the WGFD within 24 hours of killing a wolf.
- The WGFD sets hunting quotas late in the year when the number of wolves in the TGMA and the total annual wolf mortality can be estimated. If population numbers approach

federal recovery criteria or if annual mortality increases from other causes, the WGFD can adjust hunting quotas accordingly.

Montana

Montana House Bill 73 was signed into law on February 13, 2013 and provided for the following changes in wolf management in Montana:

- Increases the bag limit from 1 to 3 wolf tags per sportsman.
- Allows the use of electronic wolf calls.
- Exempts hunters from wearing hunter orange outside of deer/elk season.
- Prohibits establishing buffer zones and closures in areas adjacent to national parks.
- Reduces the price of a nonresident wolf tag from \$350 to \$50.

We reviewed these changes in Montana statute and determined that they do not represent significant threats to the Montana wolf population and therefore do not warrant a full status review.

Bag limits: HB 73 authorizes the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) Commission to set the number of tags per hunter/trapper. The Commission recently set the maximum limit at 3 tags per sportsman (either by hunting or trapping). A sportsman can only harvest a total of 3 wolves.

- At the end of 2011, Montana documented a minimum of 653 wolves in at least 130 packs (including at least 39 breeding pairs) prior to the 2012 breeding season. Livestock control actions removed approximately 30 wolves in 2012, and another 218 wolves were harvested during the 2012/2013 hunting season, which closed at the end of February 2013. Given that the population low point going into 2012's breeding season was several times the minimum management target (at least 15 breeding pairs and at least 150 wolves), it is unlikely that these changes will cause the population to drop below that target in one year.

Electronic calls & Hunter orange: The use of electronic wolf calls and no requirement for hunters wearing orange outside of elk/deer seasons are not consistent with Montana's game management policies. However, MFWP explained that they regulate big game by monitoring their population numbers and establishing appropriate harvest quotas to meet their management objectives. Montana hunters have never been able to meet wolf quotas and the wolf population continues to increase. MFWP is incrementally liberalizing their hunting regulations by adding these 2 tools to help hunters increase wolf harvest. If these tools result in higher hunter success than expected, the Commission reserves the right to close the season at any time. Additionally, hunting regulations are reviewed annually, and the Commission can reduce quotas and season length if needed.

Buffer zones: HB 73 prohibits the establishment of buffer zones adjacent to national parks, but it authorizes the Commission to set quotas and close such areas after established quotas are met. The Commission can set low quotas in those areas to prevent excessive hunter harvest.

Price of nonresident tags: Reduction in the price of a nonresident wolf tag will have no immediate effect on the wolf population, given MFWP Commission has set bags limits and the duration of wolf hunting/trapping season.

Finally, as stated in the post-delisting portion of our 2009 delisting rule, we will publish an annual analysis of the State's wolf population reports and the status of the region's wolf population in mid-April of each year. This assessment will consider the number of packs, breeding pairs, and the total number of wolves in mid-winter by State and by recovery area as well as any changes in threats, and will provide a more complete assessment of the impacts of Montana's hunting and trapping seasons.