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Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance • Friends of the Clearwater
Alliance for the Wild Rockies • Oregon Wild • Cascadia Wildlands Project
Western Watersheds Project • Wildlands Project**

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Twelve Conservation Groups Challenge Federal Wolf Delisting

Missoula, MT— Twelve conservation groups are fighting for the survival of wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains. The groups today filed a federal court lawsuit challenging the federal government’s decision to remove the northern Rockies gray wolf population from the list of endangered species. Wolves should not have been delisted, the groups argue, because they remain threatened by biased, inadequate state management plans, as well as by the lack of connections between largely isolated state wolf populations.

The Fish and Wildlife Service’s premature decision to strip the protections of the Endangered Species Act from the northern Rocky Mountains’ wolves promises to undo the hard-earned progress toward wolf recovery of recent years. State laws that guide wolf management in the wake of delisting betray the states’ continued hostility toward the presence of wolves in the region. While ensuring that wolves can and will be killed in defense of property or recreation, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana have refused to make enforceable commitments to maintaining viable wolf populations within their borders. The states have failed to keep track of recent wolf killings and also neglected to secure funding for essential monitoring and conservation efforts.

Actions by the states of Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, and by individuals, since wolves were delisted demonstrate the need to resume federal safeguards for wolves until state plans are in place that ensure a sustainable wolf population in the region. For example, on the very day delisting took effect — March 28, 2008 — Idaho Governor Butch Otter signed into law a new Idaho law allowing Idaho citizens to kill wolves without a permit whenever wolves are annoying, disturbing, or “worrying” livestock or domestic animals. Since delisting, Wyoming has implemented its “kill on sight” predator law in nearly 90 percent of the state. Not surprisingly, these hostile state laws have resulted in a wave of new wolf killings.

At present, wolves in central Idaho, northwestern Montana, and the Greater Yellowstone area remain largely disconnected from each other and wolves in Canada. The wolves of the Greater Yellowstone area, in particular, have remained genetically isolated since 31 wolves were introduced into Yellowstone National Park more than a decade ago. Moreover, the region’s population of 1,500 wolves still falls short of the numbers that independent scientists have determined to be necessary to secure the health of the species in the northern Rockies.

With continued recovery efforts, real wolf recovery in the region is within reach. Delisting further endangers wolves because of increased wolf killing, reduced wolf numbers, and less genetic exchange between wolf populations.

Earthjustice filed the lawsuit on behalf of Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity, The Humane Society of the United States, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Friends of the Clearwater, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands Project, Western Watersheds Project, and Wildlands Project.

Conservation Group Statements:

“The recent senseless and indiscriminate killings of wolves in Wyoming and Idaho clearly highlight the serious problems of the current state plans. Wolves need to be managed responsibly under plans that are based on current and reliable science. Running wolves down with snowmobiles and shooting the exhausted animals is not management – it’s far too extreme and unsustainable.” Suzanne Asha Stone, Defenders of Wildlife

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“There is nothing in the state management schemes or delisting rule itself to prevent the killing of up to 80 percent of wolves in the northern Rockies. Attempts by the Fish and Wildlife Service to assure the public otherwise have no factual basis.” Louisa Willcox, Natural Resources Defense Council

“Wolves in the northern Rockies are just now on the cusp of biological recovery, but aren’t ready for delisting. Current state management allows for wolf populations to be cut by up to 80 percent. Since delisting, our worst fears are coming true. In Wyoming, wolves are being killed at an alarming rate, with over a dozen wolves killed so far.” Melanie Stein, Sierra Club

“Just as disturbing as the state management plans that permit killing of hundreds of wolves is the expected increase in federal predator control, including ramped up aerial gunning, leghold traps and even poisoning of wolves. Federal predator control on behalf of the livestock industry is what exterminated wolves in the first place, and that was before the era of helicopter sharpshooters pursuing radio-collared wolves. We will bring this alarming prospect to a court’s attention.” Michael Robinson, Center for Biological Diversity

“Idaho wins the prize for wanting to kill the most wolves. Wyoming wins for the most blatant hostility toward wolves enshrined in state law. And Montana wears the crown for killing the most wolves 8 of the last 10 years despite having the smallest wolf population of all three states.” John Grandy, Ph.D., senior vice president of The Humane Society of the United States

“We are concerned that Wyoming will strictly adhere to the language in the state legislation and aggressively eliminate wolves, some of which occupy Jackson Hole and parts of Grand Teton National Park. With Wyoming’s current plan, wolves two miles from Jackson’s Town Square could be killed by anyone at any time—this is reprehensible.” Franz Camenzind, Ph.D. Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance

“As evidenced by the of State of Idaho’s proposals to aerial gun wolves in the Frank Church Wilderness and to kill up to 75% of the wolves on the Upper Lochsa while wolves remained protected, delisting at this time poses a great risk to the Northern Rockies wolf population, which is still recovering.” Will Boyd, Education Director, Friends of the Clearwater

“Legal action is necessary to prevent the states from implementing management schemes that have the primary purpose of eliminating, rather than conserving, wolves.” Michael Garrity, Alliance for the Wild Rockies

“Oregon’s wolves are considered part of the Northern Rockies population, yet only five wolves that have returned to Oregon since 1999, and two were illegally shot. Whether people in Oregon ever get the opportunity to see and hear wolves someday, depends upon strong federal endangered species protection that prevents unnecessary killing of wolves throughout the Northern Rockies.” Steve Pedery, Conservation Director of Oregon Wild

“The sudden and bloody increase in wolf killings since delisting confirms that wolves remain at risk in the west. To ensure the survival of wolves these magnificent animals need to expand their range throughout the western states. There are many public lands across the west with abundant elk and deer populations that can and should sustain wolves.” Jon Marvel, Western Watersheds Project

“For thousands of years, people lived alongside vibrant wolf populations in what is now the U.S. west. Misguided efforts to eradicate wolves over much of the last 150 years seriously damaged the land and ecosystems on which all life depends. Americans started the healing process by returning wolves to their natural place in the scheme of things, but that is now being threatened by a return to 19th century thinking and politics.” David Johns, Wildlands Project

“The spate of wolf killings since delisting—including wolves chased down by snowmobiles and stalked at state-run feedgrounds in Wyoming—makes clear the need to reinstate protections for wolves under the Endangered Species Act.” Jenny Harbine, Earthjustice

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The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to responsible land stewardship to ensure that human activities are in harmony with the area’s irreplaceable wildlife, scenic and other natural resources.