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## **Bush Administration Giving Up on Wolf Delisting, For Now**

*Tacit admission Earthjustice lawsuit to protect wolves was correct*

Bozeman, MT -- In a sweeping victory for the gray wolves of the northern Rockies, the Bush administration has moved to reinstate federal Endangered Species Act protection for wolves. The federal government asked a federal court for permission to withdraw its March 2008 decision that dropped Endangered Species Act protections for wolves in the Northern Rockies.

In July, a federal judge stopped the slaughter of wolves in response to a case brought by Earthjustice seeking reinstatement of federal Endangered Species Act protections. The court issued an injunction applying to wolves in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. The court ruled that conservation groups were likely to succeed in their claims that Wyoming's management of wolves was inadequate and that wolves in the three states suffer from a lack of genetic connectivity.

"This is great news for the wolves. It took a court order to stop the killing of five hundred wolves in fall hunts. We are one step closer to true recovery of a native to the Northern Rockies that was driven to extinction in most places," said Earthjustice attorney Doug Honnold.

"It's time for the government to address connectivity and the failure of state laws to adequately protect wolves," continued Honnold. "We are close to having healthy sustainable populations of wolves and now the government needs to come up with a new approach that gives us a self sustaining wolf population as required by federal law."

The news comes at the same time the government released a report finding wolves are not as plentiful in the Northern Rockies as federal authorities had forecast as recently as this past spring. New government data suggest there are fewer than 1500 wolves, instead of the 2000 earlier predicted, in the Northern Rockies population. So far, government scientists have not documented whether the population decline is due to disease or illegal, unreported wolf killings. Since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) delisted wolves on March 28, states have assumed legal management authority for wolves leading to the shooting of at least more than 170 wolves. The region's population of 1,450 wolves falls short of the 2,000 to 5,000 wolves that independent scientists have determined to be necessary to secure the health of the species.

In a February Science magazine article, even the top federal official in charge of recovering wolves, Ed Bangs, said he personally thought the FWS recovery target of 300 wolves was too low.

The same Science magazine article reported that Dr. Robert Wayne, a professor of evolutionary biology at the University of California, sent a letter to the FWS in 2007 saying that the recovery goal “severely underestimates the number of wolves required for maintaining a genetically healthy, self-sustaining meta-population.”

In contrast to the Northern Rockies, in the Midwest, the FWS recovery target is roughly 1,500 wolves; FWS delisted the Great Lakes gray population in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, when it reached a population level of 4000 wolves.

With continued recovery efforts, legitimate wolf recovery in the region is readily attainable. However, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana have refused to make enforceable commitments to maintaining viable wolf populations within their borders.

Earthjustice filed suit 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, and Western Watersheds Project.