

WOLVES AT A CROSSROADS: 2011

THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT IN PERIL



PREPARED BY LIVING WITH WOLVES

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This document has been carefully and thoroughly researched. The statistics and data have been extracted from official state and federal government documents or from other highly reputable sources. Attributions for all sections are available for those who would like this information by contacting us at livingwithwolves@cox.net Cover photograph ©Jim Dutcher.

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Wolves: Endangered Species Status and Subsequent Litigation

The heated controversy over gray wolves in the West is reaching a breaking point as frustrations build on both sides of the issue. Both wolves in America, and one of our most important and valued environmental laws, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), are now at a crossroads, their future uncertain.

The purpose of this document is to present the hard evidence for your consideration, illustrating that there is no emergency or urgency that warrants legislative intervention in regard to wolves in the Northern Rockies.

The premise of the proposed legislation, and the position of the regional state governments, is built on intentionally misleading rhetoric. The substance of this rhetoric is that there exists a crisis with regard to the impact of wolves on elk populations and livestock. By using comprehensive and conclusive research and data provided by the state and federal agencies in charge of managing wolves, other wildlife, and predator-livestock conflicts, this document clearly illustrates that there exists no such crisis. Understanding these details of wolf management will demonstrate that legislative intervention involving wolves and the ESA is unnecessary.

To remove any species from ESA protections by an act of Congressional legislation is unprecedented. Procedural channels designed by the ESA, based on sound scientific process, guide the removal species from their endangered species status. In the case of wolves, this process was not properly followed and was found by a federal court to be in violation of the ESA. Wolves were to remain on the Endangered Species List until their “delisting” was in compliance with the ESA.

Congressional interference stands to weaken the Endangered Species Act, endangering critical protection that has served our nation well for more than 37 years. Next to bald eagles, the recovery of wolves in the American West has the potential to be one of the most celebrated success stories of the ESA and another great stride in preserving our natural heritage. Or, conversely, by allowing legislation to mandate the removal of ESA protections for wolves, our nation stands to set a dangerous new precedent for all endangered species and environmental stewardship.

If wolves can be removed from federal protection by willful misrepresentation of scientific fact, what species will be next?

Background: Partial Delisting of Wolves, 2009

In March of 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) delisted wolves in Montana and Idaho, but left them listed in Wyoming due to Wyoming's predator control laws, which allowed for the unregulated, unlicensed year-round killing of wolves in 88% of the state, all but the northwest corner.

The FWS adopted this "split the states" approach to delisting in 2009 even though the agency had previously taken the formal position that this approach would not pass legal muster.

By June of 2009, a legal challenge was underway. While the plaintiffs (an assembly of 13 conservation groups) challenged the 2009 Northern Rockies wolf delisting on a number of grounds, the district court addressed only the "split the states" issue. Because the court found the delisting rule unlawful on this basis, it was unnecessary to decide whether the rule was unlawful for the additional reasons argued by the plaintiffs. The court held that the ESA requires the FWS to assess the health, threats, and viability of a wildlife population comprehensively, rather than allowing the FWS to declare part of a listed biological population recovered. This legal principle is especially important to ensure that protections and recovery of imperiled species cover the entire listed species, not merely part of it.

Federal District Court Ruling, 2010

On August 5, 2010 in *Defenders of Wildlife v. Salazar*, the Montana federal district court issued a summary judgment ruling, striking down the FWS 2009 delisting of gray wolves in the Northern Rockies. The court ruled that the delisting by the FWS violated the ESA because it delisted a portion of a population along state lines rather than treating the population as a whole.

The FWS had initially delisted gray wolves throughout the Northern Rockies in 2008. But the FWS withdrew that delisting rule after the Montana federal district court granted a preliminary injunction based on the lack of genetic connectivity between wolves in the Yellowstone area and wolves elsewhere in the Northern Rockies. The judge also cited Wyoming law that promoted wolf extermination in most of the state.

A Comparative Analysis: Wolves, Bald Eagles and the ESA

Like the bald eagle, there are, and have always been healthy wolf populations in Canada

and Alaska. Because of this stable wolf population to the north, the argument has been presented that there is no justification for the wolf's "endangered" designation in the lower 48. To the contrary, like bald eagles, wolves should be protected and recovered in the lower 48 under the ESA to restore populations that have been eradicated from their native ecosystems.

With 16,000 breeding pairs of bald eagles living in the lower 48, and their recovery a clear success, they are justifiably no longer designated as an endangered species. Even though bald eagles are not protected under the ESA, they are still protected from excessive mortality under several laws including the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Lacey Act. These regulatory backstops ensure that recovery of this recently imperiled species is not jeopardized by a lack of adequate legal protections.

Unlike bald eagles, the protections afforded to wolves under the ESA are the species' only legal safety net.

In 2006, the FWS announced its intention to remove wolves from ESA protections. In January 2007, in a rally in front of 300 hunters, Idaho Governor "Butch" Otter said he will support public hunts to kill all but 100 of Idaho's 650 wolves, or 85% of the state's recovering population, once the federal government removes them from ESA protections. Then Otter signed a proclamation making that day "Idaho Sportsmen Day."

Northern Rockies wolves were delisted in 2009, in Idaho and Montana (not in Wyoming) once they reached a population of 1,700 and were immediately subjected to aggressive state efforts to reduce their numbers.

Management of the wolf was handed over from the FWS to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the state agencies that manage wildlife. Immediately, the two states initiated hunting seasons, which have only recently been halted due to the August 5, 2010 ruling.

Idaho's hunt was more aggressive than Montana's, with hunting of wolves by outfitters taking place even during the period when wolves were having pups and therefore restricted in their movements. In many parts of Idaho, the hunt lasted seven months, an extremely long season for any animal. Had they been allowed to continue with their officially stated objective, Idaho Fish and Game planned to reduce their state wolf populations by as much as 50% in the first two hunting seasons. And in Montana, leading up to the second annual wolf-hunting season, the state more than doubled their hunting quota for wolves from 75 to 186, representing over 35% of the state's most current population estimate.

This approach to management is unprecedented and unlike that experienced by any other animal so recently removed from the Endangered Species List.

Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity

It is of extreme importance, not just in this case alone, but for the integrity of the Endangered Species Act itself, that the fate of the reintroduced wolf under the ESA is decided using biologically and scientifically valid and supportable facts. Much of the public outcry against the wolf in the West is based on myths and outright falsehoods, with little or no attempt to correct unsupportable and willful misstatements by public figures and opponents of wolf reintroduction.

The importance of scientifically factual information as the basis of decision-making process was clearly stated by the Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity, dated March, 9, 2009, stating the guidance and recommendations of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. As the first department secretary to comply with this memorandum, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar issued a clearly written order on September 29, 2010, to ensure the integrity of the scientific process in his department. (This order can be found at <http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/Salazar-Issues-Secretarial-Order-to-Ensure-Integrity-of-Scientific-Process-in-Departmental-Decision-Making.cfm>)

Consideration of the status of the reintroduced wolf in the West would provide an excellent opportunity to discredit ancient falsehoods and biologically unsupportable tales about wolves, and to insure the protection of a complete and functional ecosystem. The fate of the wolf is certainly the subject at hand, but the fate of quite possibly America's most important environmental law ever written, the ESA itself, is at stake as well.

From this point on in this document, it is illustrated that scientific integrity has largely not directed policy in the case of wolf recovery and wolf management.

The Issues: Real, Perceived, or Somewhere in the Middle?

Wolves and Elk

Some members of the hunting community have stridently opposed wolf recovery because they contend that wolves are decimating elk and deer populations in the Northern Rockies. This contention is especially common among hunting outfitters. Groups backing

this contingent of the opposition include the NRA, Safari Club International, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. All three of these groups and several others have joined the multiple appeals of the federal district court's August 5, 2010 ruling.

While elk and deer populations are shown to be robust, a more reasoned explanation to the vocal opposition to wolves coming from hunters and hunting groups is that the percentage of hunters who succeed in killing the animal for which they bought a tag, the "hunter success rate," has fallen. Elk are unlikely to still be occupying the same locations where they could be found prior to the presence of wolves. Both elk and wolves move and redistribute in accord with changes in environmental conditions (i.e. weather, precipitation, and in some areas, fire-related habitat change). Because of the presence of wolves, elk are now less commonly found lingering in meadows, down low in valleys and in riparian areas. They are more likely to seek the security of dense timber or stay high on ridges where they have the advantage of detecting approaching threats to which they are now more alert. Bottoms of steep valleys are difficult to escape and noisy streams detract from the ability to hear approaching predators. So while elk travel through these areas, they tend not to linger there as much as before. Elk have reverted to behaving more like elk now and less like cattle. This has all made elk hunting more challenging for people. Hunters who are succeeding now have learned to adjust their tactics to account for this changed behavior.

Wolves move their prey in ways that the other large carnivores do not. Bears and mountain lions rely on ambush and short distance chase tactics, where the hunt concludes one way or the other in very short order. They are not physically capable of a long chase. But wolves are built very differently, both physically and socially. Their hunting style is different in two key ways. They do not have the ability to bring about an instant kill like bears and mountain lions, and rely instead on the social cooperation of the pack to bring down their prey. While bears and mountain lions prefer the element of surprise, wolves are visible when hunting, and trigger the flight mechanism in their prey. The kill, when it is successful, is usually the end result of a longer chase that requires endurance rather than ambush, and begins with the singling out of what most often are the weakest and most vulnerable members of the herd. Wolves therefore redistribute their prey in ways the other large carnivores do not. Elk are now exhibiting different learned behavior as a result of this different predatory style.

Regarding the claims of elk herd decimation, the truth is that elk populations are at or above population goals established by the state game agencies in most places in Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. There are localized areas where elk populations have declined following the reintroduction of wolves in the Northern Rockies, but the FWS has acknowledged that those declines cannot be attributed to wolf activity alone. Elk populations naturally fluctuate depending on the abundance of foraging resources, which are affected by rainfall, warming temperatures, encroachment of human development,

and changing forest conditions. These regional (some of them cyclical) trends have been carefully documented for several decades, many established long before wolf reintroduction.

- Overall, in the three states (ID, MT and WY) where wolves have been re-introduced, there has been a steady trend upward in elk populations, consistent with the general trend prior to reintroduction. Just in the past year, the tri-state combined population has increased from 350,000 to 371,000 elk.
- Montana and Wyoming have observed a steady increase in elk populations. And while Idaho's elk population has been in a period of modest decline in the last two years, 23 of Idaho's 29 elk zones are at or above state-established objectives, according to a report released in August of 2010 by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the state agency in charge of counting and managing elk. However, Idaho Governor "Butch" Otter claims that this is not the case.
- Idaho is home to half a million deer and more than 100,000 elk.
- With its steadily growing elk population at 120,000 elk, Wyoming is now 50% above management objectives of 80,000.
- Montana's elk population has grown 20% over the past five years, and has now reached 150,000 elk.
- Contrary to what many people, including political leaders, in these three states suggest, with abundant elk and many, many more deer, there is no legitimate concern that 1,700 wolves will wipe out or "decimate" deer and elk herds.
- These erroneous claims of herd decimation are being made by authors of the pending legislation, as well as by the governors of Idaho and Wyoming.
- To combat the destructive economic and ecological impacts of elk and other ungulates (all animals with hooves, including deer, elk, and moose), the state game agencies in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming continue to implement a variety of "antlerless" hunting seasons also known as "damage hunts." Beyond the ecological impact burgeoning elk populations can have on vegetative communities, elk also have an economic impact when they cause damage to crops such as grains, as well as to hay and haystacks. Targeting the "antlerless" deer and elk in these additional hunting seasons is, by design, targeting the productive females. If these populations were imperiled as suggested, such practices would not be tools of management.
- It is expected that there will be localized fluctuations as prey and predator populations come into balance. Out of necessity, the prey will adapt to the new presence of an endurance predator that hunts collaboratively in packs, rather than the solitary, surprise/ambush predators (bears, mountain lions, humans).
- One result of this adaptation to the presence of wolves by prey species, most notably elk, hasn't been as much a decline in elk populations, but a decrease in (human) hunter success rates when hunting elk. More actively mobile and alert elk have heightened the challenge for hunters. This hunter frustration, based on

- changes in hunting opportunity as a consequence of elk distribution, and not on herd decimation, is the primary source of outcry from outfitters and many hunters.
- If wolves could wipe out entire herds of ungulates, they would have done so long ago in Canada, Alaska and Siberia, where wolves co-exist with moose, deer, elk, caribou and other prey species, and all thrive.

As in Africa and a few other parts of the world where large herds of grazing animals coexist with a smaller numbers of predators, millennia of predators chasing their prey have led to the development of grazing animals (a.k.a. game species) that are amazing specimens of nature. Ed Bangs has headed the Wolf Recovery Program for the FWS since 1989. In a Montana Sporting Journal interview in fall of 2010, Mr. Bangs was asked about wolves and their impact on other wildlife populations. He responded,

“It is important to keep in mind the issue isn’t the effect of wolves on wild ungulates. A famous poem by Robinson Jeffers says, ‘What but the wolf’s tooth whittled so fleet the limbs of the antelope.’ Likewise, elk are the magnificent animal we cherish because of thousands of years of wolf predation. The conflict comes from wolves eating the things people also want to eat.”

Wolves and Livestock

Many ranchers are opposed to wolf recovery because, like other predators, wolves occasionally kill or injure sheep and cattle. But a growing number of ranchers are learning methods and adjusting their husbandry practices to minimize losses to all predators.

Wolf predation (wolves targeting animals as prey, in this context, specifically livestock) is a relatively minor source of livestock mortality. However, in some geographic areas, wolves prey repeatedly on livestock and these losses, while not always significant in number, can present serious problems for ranchers. With the reintroduction of wolves, ranchers are confronted with new situations that require new management techniques to protect stock.

It should, however, be noted that more sheep and cows die from lightning strikes, dog attacks, and noxious weeds than from wolf predation. Other predators, such as bears and mountain lions, also kill livestock. Coyotes, for example, are responsible for killing more than ten times more sheep and lambs than those killed by wolves. Yet the leading causes of livestock mortality are NOT predators, but exposure to bad weather, disease, and birthing complications. Ranchers are also faced with other human-caused challenges in today’s world. With the rise in beef prices, the ranching industry is also experiencing

an increasing trend in cattle theft, or rustling, on the open range. However, for ranchers, living with wolves can present challenges.

It is important to note that livestock predation by wolves is not an ever-increasing trend as suggested by regional politicians in the Northern Rockies and by others backing the pending legislative bills designed to delist wolves. In Wyoming, wolves have killed fewer livestock in 2010 than in any year since 2003. In Idaho, wolves have killed more than 30% fewer livestock in 2010 than in the previous year.

Ongoing work with ranchers by several organizations skilled in addressing conflicts between large carnivores and livestock demonstrates that such losses can be reduced. Their efforts are met with success and are resulting in fewer dead livestock and therefore fewer dead wolves. Proactive, practical and simple changes in livestock husbandry and management on public and private lands have brought viable results. However, resources must be available to make these changes in concert with working ranchers who are willing to alter their practices. The costs of fine-tuning these management practices should be handled so as not come from the already marginal profits of livestock producers struggling under changing economic and market conditions. While fine-tuning the application of these management practices will involve initial expenses, in the long run, there will be financial return in terms of livestock saved from predation.

The Compensation Programs and Their Shortcomings

Both federal and individual state compensation programs are currently in place to reimburse ranchers who suffer stock losses from wolf attacks. These funds also include resources for preventive methods in management and husbandry practices that reduce the availability and vulnerability of livestock to wolves and other large carnivores. These methods have been dubbed “non-lethal control.” While some funding has been earmarked for non-lethal control, unfortunately, these state and federal funds have largely been used to reimburse state wildlife programs for compensation payments for livestock losses, often without rigorous investigation as to the cause.

This practice by state agencies limits the availability of already meager resources available for the initiation of practical measures that can reduce the risk of predator predation on livestock. Opportunity exists for existing federal programs and policy (eg. Federal Land and Policy Management Act of 1976, Sec. 10(j) amendment (1982) to ESA) to offer aid and assistance in implementing preventive and proactive measures to Western ranchers and livestock producers who graze livestock on public lands shared with pre-existing large carnivores, such as grizzly bears, mountain lions and wolves.

However, federal managers have largely ignored these programs, resulting in state agencies and legislators often using these funds to simply blame and kill wolves. This approach to management is a short-term measure of only limited effectiveness for reducing wolf-livestock conflict. In effect, it favors costly reaction to predator-livestock conflict over the more cost-effective prevention of conflicts.

In the past 15 years, approximately 1,500 wolves have been killed, mostly through federal predator control programs, for reason of livestock depredation, or even perceived threats. This practice has the desired political effect of fueling rhetoric and misinformation on behalf of anti-wolf interests. In addition, it marginalizes a broader public constituency and stakeholders in a science-based, comprehensive and balanced approach to conservation of wolves and other large carnivores.

False Claims are Exceedingly Common in the Compensation Programs

Wildlife Services, formerly Animal Damage Control, operates under APHIS, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the USDA. This agency is responsible for responding to claims of livestock subjected to carnivore predation (when a predator targets prey).

When predation is reported, a Wildlife Services agent is supposed to investigate the scene, conduct an entire necropsy (an autopsy on an animal) and determine the cause of the livestock's death. If the investigation concludes that wolves were the cause of death, Wildlife Services determines whether to suggest a "control action" to target and kill the suspected offending wolf or wolves. Control actions are taken against many kinds of predators. But in the case of wolves, the state game agency managing them would issue an order to Wildlife Services to kill a specific number of wolves in the control action. But in Montana, beginning in March of 2010, the state agency in charge of managing wolves (Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks) changed its policy, allowing Wildlife Services to act immediately, without the need to get an order from or even inform the agency beforehand.

Unfortunately, the fact that reimbursement is available to ranchers for wolf-caused livestock deaths has corrupted this system. The agent, a government trapper who often lives in the same community as the rancher, arrives to write his report. The pressure can be strong from the rancher and from Wildlife Services supervisors to simply label a livestock death as a wolf kill. If the trapper marks on the government form that the dead livestock was a "probable" wolf kill, the rancher will receive 50% of fair market value for the dead animal. If the trapper marks it as a "confirmed" wolf kill, the rancher will receive 100% of fair market value. If a rancher can get the trapper to mark the incident as "probable" or "confirmed," that rancher may, and often will, add to the tally additional

missing livestock for which he will likely be compensated. Once one “wolf kill” is confirmed, the tendency of many Wildlife Services trappers is to call everything a “wolf kill” without sufficient proof, and sometimes even in the absence of a carcass.

It is not uncommon for ranchers to collect on dead livestock (cattle and calves, sheep and lambs) reported as wolf kills, when in fact these animals may have been killed by any of a host of other factors. These include other predators such as bears, mountain lions, coyotes, domestic dogs, foxes and eagles. Funds designated for “wolf kill” reimbursement have been distributed to ranchers for livestock that died of disease and exposure to the elements. A rotting carcass draws a variety of scavengers, including wolves. Their presence at such a food source does NOT mean they did the killing. Wolf tracks near the tracks of other animals, however, are often enough or perhaps an excuse for the trapper to blame wolves, especially when the rancher is looking over the trapper’s shoulder. While such pressure causes bad livestock death investigations, it’s reasonable to assume that an informed and thorough investigation could more accurately determine what killed the livestock. Many times it may not be wolves. They are simply convenient and popular scapegoats that offer the rancher a much higher likelihood of compensation.

Carter Niemeyer is a recently retired federal and state employee in wolf management who carries stacks of hard evidence and is willing to testify forcefully on these matters. His credentials are unshakable. He formerly served at the top of the West’s federal wolf recovery program as one of the leaders in wolf reintroduction. Mr. Niemeyer worked for USDA’s Wildlife Services for decades as the point man on livestock death investigations. His book, *Wolfer*, just released in December of 2010, in case after case, reveals in detail the extent of false claims.

This issue exists for the following reasons: as of the fall of 2010, there has been little or no oversight at Wildlife Services; there are inconsistencies between investigators’ knowledge, abilities and observations; and there has been little or no transparency of the process or co-investigation at livestock deaths. The process, the way it is currently structured, has been tolerated for a long time. While at most Wildlife Services levels poor investigations are not deliberate, they are sloppy, and show unwillingness by trappers and their supervisors to be scientifically and biologically meticulous, and to be thorough and accountable to the general public, not just to the ranchers. With more than \$35 million spent to bring wolves back, and the level of controversy over their presence in the American West, clearly better management with transparency and oversight is needed.

Currently, there is incentive to keep the system operating in this dysfunctional manner. But it does the entire program a disservice. False claims are diluting the ability to make sufficient funding available to the ranchers who have valid wolf-kill claims. And ultimately, this originally well-intended, but now corrupted process results in continual “control actions,” killing wolves that never were guilty to begin with. Approximately

1,500 wolves have been killed for their alleged role in conflicts with livestock since reintroduction.

There are certainly viable options to bring much-needed oversight to this program. They include equipping those conducting the investigation with inexpensive point-and-shoot cameras and requiring that they document the incident upon first arriving at the scene. The investigator should also be required to skin, or remove the entire hide from, the carcass. Each predator (wolves, mountain lions, coyotes, bears and others) has a signature way of killing. An examination and photo documentation of the carcass under the skin will reveal and confirm that signature, if indeed it was a predator that killed the animal to begin with.

How Many are 1,700 Wolves Living in the West?

Not very many. The Western states already support big populations of other predators. Idaho alone, for example, is home to an estimated 50,000 coyotes, 20,000 black bears and 2,500 mountain lions. With an area spanning much of three large Western states, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, there is ample room for 1,700 wolves and certainly no need to try to dramatically reduce that population. On December 8, 2010, Idaho's Department of Fish and Game suspended its 2008-2012 management plan, which called for a population of 518-732 wolves, in favor of their 2002 management plan, which allows for wolves to be reduced to a minimum of 10-15 packs in the entire state. In Idaho, the average pack size tends to be fewer than ten wolves.

More wolves live in Minnesota than in any other state, with 3,000 wolves living in the northern portion of the state, an area amounting to far less than half the state's total acreage. In the Northern Rockies, 1,700 wolves are distributed over an area that encompasses the vast majority of the state of Idaho, all of western Montana and northwestern Wyoming. A few packs have also established a foothold in eastern Oregon and eastern Washington where suitable wolf habitat exists. In terms of predator carrying capacity with respect to prey base, there isn't an issue for concern. An unchecked overabundance of ungulates (all animals with hooves, including deer and elk) has had a well-documented and historically negative impact on some fragile ecosystems across the arid West.

Reintroduction of Wolves: A Financial and Biological Windfall

Wolf Tourism

Over the years, in excess of \$35 million in taxpayer funds have been spent on wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies to return this national icon to its natural habitat. A study from the University of Montana has revealed that the presence of wolves alone as a tourist attraction in Yellowstone National Park brings in the same amount annually, \$35 million tourism dollars, every year, to the local economy. Yellowstone is the only location where there has been an economic study, but wolf tourism is already active in several other places.

Wolf Ecology

The recovery of the ecosystem of Yellowstone National Park in response to wolf reintroduction has been astounding, with scientific research still underway. Numerous scientific studies have explored an assortment of top-down effects known as “trophic cascades,” the direct effects of bringing back the keystone predator, the wolf, to the biological framework from which it was removed.

As socially cooperative endurance hunters, as opposed to solitary ambush hunters, wolves are the only predator that keeps herds of ungulates moving around the landscape, allowing young saplings to grow into trees rather than exclusively serving as forage for deer and elk. Prior to reintroduction, there were no new aspen groves and the youngest aspens in the park were approaching 70 years old, corresponding with the historic extermination of wolves in the park. For 70 years, a burgeoning elk population had browsed all aspen shoots down to their roots. The elk devastated riparian areas by doing the same to the littoral willows that line the banks of a typical Rocky Mountain stream. Wolves brought on the effect coined “the ecology of fear.” Elk behavior changed, reverting to behavior established as the two species co-evolved over millennia.

The documented results show that

- Vegetative communities rebounded.
- New willows and aspen provided food and building materials for beaver colonies. Prior to wolf reintroduction, there was one beaver colony in the northern range of the park. Now there are at least 12. Beaver ponds, aquatic habitat created by beavers, support a wide range of plants and animals.
- There is an increase in songbird populations brought about by an increase in nesting habitat.
- Vegetation overhanging stream banks provides cooling shade over the water,

- providing improved habitat for trout, aquatic insects and amphibians to thrive.
- Wolves compete with coyotes and have cut their population in half. Prolific coyotes had filled the partial vacuum created by the wolf's absence. While coyotes specialize in preying on antelope fawns every spring, wolves do not. The result of wolf reintroduction has been the rebound of a once diminished antelope population in the park. It is thought that pronghorn antelope choose the vicinity of wolf dens to birth their fawns because coyotes will avoid these areas.
 - Coyotes also specialize in “mousing,” or hunting small rodents. Fewer coyotes and the resulting number of small rodents have boosted the populations of birds of prey and other competitors for that food source.

That is to list just a few results of the reintroduction of the wolf. These extensive cascading effects caught the scientific community by surprise, with studies of the far-reaching impact of wolf reintroduction still underway. The consensus is that the ecosystem of the park has not been so healthy in more than half a century.

Undertaken to lessen the pressure the continuous grazing of ungulates has inflicted on sensitive plant communities, dramatic efforts to cull these animals have often been implemented as part of the solution. On public lands, incentivizing increased hunting has often been the ticket, while in Yellowstone National Park exporting elk and shooting by park rangers has historically been called for. The extent of the impact unchecked ungulates can have on plant communities and the effects their elimination has had on dependent wildlife, is only now beginning to be understood. The reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park, and their subsequent predation on the animals that had been over-browsing the park's sensitive flora, has led to previously undocumented observations.

Wolves: A Conflict of Management Interests

Why Do State Game Agencies Manage Wolves the Way They Do?

In order to understand Idaho and Montana's aggressive approach to wolf management, aimed at dramatically reducing the current wolf population (in Idaho by as much as 50%, while indications from the governor point to far more to come), it is important to recognize the business model of the state game agencies that manage wildlife. The fact that they are often referred to as “game agencies” is one indicator. In Idaho, it is not Idaho Fish, Game and Wildlife, but simply Idaho Fish and Game.

The only significant revenue stream Idaho Fish and Game can control is their sale of

hunting permits and licenses and fishing licenses. It is those sales that account for 46% of their projected 2011 income. Nearly all of the remaining funds come from federal grants and income over which the agency has little influence, such as a federal excise tax on outdoor equipment. They do not receive funding from general taxpayer dollars which, if they did, would represent the diverse interests of all Americans. Instead, the revenue stream they can influence comes directly from hunting and fishing advocates. So it is their publicly stated opinion (and perhaps rightfully so) that they work for the sportsmen who pay them. Their own reports clearly say so.

However, they are in charge of managing all wildlife in their state, not just game animals. When you are in the business of selling big game, it doesn't make a lot of sense to have predators running around eating your unrealized profits. As a result, what they manage may more closely resemble a game farm than balanced nature. And is not a model for healthy ecosystem management.

Several studies show that there is an equally large amount of money spent on non-consumptive wildlife usage, such as wildlife viewing, catch-and-release fishing, photography, hiking, camping, etc., as there is on the consumptive uses. And while the trends of wildlife viewing are increasing, the percentage of Americans who actively hunt has been steadily decreasing over the years and decades. Current estimates are that 6% of Americans hunt. And it is for that mere 6%, and for the powerful special interests groups that represent them, that America's wildlife is being managed.

Wolves and Politics

States' Rights

Montana and Idaho contend that they are being penalized by Wyoming's failure to adopt adequate state laws to protect wolves, thus allowing for the comprehensive delisting of wolves in the Northern Rockies. While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has approved Montana and Idaho laws, plaintiffs argued in the 2009 wolf delisting case that laws in both states failed to protect wolves, by failing to ensure that genetic connectivity with wolves in Yellowstone would occur, and failing to provide for sufficient wolf numbers. The court did not address or resolve those issues. Even though the FWS listed wolves as an endangered species across the lower 48 states (excluding Minnesota) in 1974, the FWS said that only 300 wolves are needed for recovery in the Northern Rockies, whereas roughly 1,500 wolves are needed for wolf recovery in the Midwest. Although there are approximately 1,700 wolves in the Northern Rockies presently, the FWS's delisting plan would have allowed that number to drop to only 300 wolves for the entire Northern Rockies.

Political Pressure

Aside from the legislative pressure to delist wolves brought on by an assortment of U.S. Senators and Congressmen, the state governors have also had an active role.

- After the August 5, 2010 ruling, Idaho's governor, "Butch" Otter, instructed the Idaho Fish and Game to cease all wolf management activities. The Department of Fish and Game had been assigned as the "designated agent" to manage wolves when management was turned over from FWS. The following is from a news release from the governor, which can be found here:
http://gov.idaho.gov/mediacenter/press/pr2010/proct10/pr_076.html

Governor Otter stated, "I notified Interior Secretary Ken Salazar that Idaho no longer will act as the federal government's 'designated agent,' managing wolves imposed on the state under the Endangered Species Act.

It means Fish and Game no longer will perform statewide monitoring of wolves, conduct investigations into allegedly illegal killings of wolves, provide law enforcement in response to allegedly illegal takings of wolves, or implement the livestock depredation response program. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission will immediately refocus its efforts on protecting Idaho's deer, elk and moose, and the Department of Fish and Game will apply to the Interior Department for additional flexibility in addressing wolf depredation issues so we can exercise our sovereign right to protect our wildlife...

It is my contention that ungulates are the State's 'livestock,' and that we should have the right to protect them like any livestock owner." –*Governor Otter News Release, October 19, 2010*

- On November 29, 2010, Governor "Butch" Otter (ID), Governor Dave Freudenthal (WY) and Governor Brian Schweitzer (MT), as well as Governor-elect Matt Mead (WY), met with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to try to resolve the management impasse. That meeting was followed up by conference calls between the three state governors and Secretary Salazar.
- Misinformation made available to the public also comes from the top. In a *Magic Valley Times-News* interview, Governor Otter stated his opinion of the situation,

Otter: I mean, the only thing we would accomplish as designated agent is sit there and watch the wolves continue to decimate our ungulate herds. We've got 29 elk zones in Idaho. Eleven of them are in serious trouble.

Reporter: Six of them are below expectations and only two of them are possibly due to wolves and two are due to humans.

Otter: Oh, I disagree with that.

Reporter: That's from your own Fish and Game data.

Otter: I fully understand that. I've listened to the hunters, the sportsmen and the sportsmen groups. I've listened to the outfitters and guides. And I agree there could be some displacement. But I'm not prepared to accept that only two of those zones are the result of wolf depredation on the ungulate herds...

Otter: When wolves were brought in, they said 150 wolves in Idaho and 150 wolves in Montana and 150 wolves in Wyoming. We've got our 150 wolves. They're here and in fact we probably have 10 times that many." - *Magic Valley Times-News Interview with Governor "Butch" Otter, October 19, 2010*

The highest ever year-end wolf population estimate by Idaho Fish and Game since reintroduction was 856 in 2008. At year-end 2009, the population was 843. That the population could jump to 1,500 (the 10 x 150 that Otter suggests) since that time is inconceivable. This is not the only time Otter is on record saying that there are 1,500 wolves living in Idaho despite valid, scientific research conducted by his state's own wildlife managers. Willful political misstatements continue to mislead the public.

Science vs. the U.S.F.W.S., and the ESA Caught in the Crossfire

As previously mentioned, Ed Bangs has been the leader of the Wolf Recovery Program for the FWS since 1989. He is considered the Department of the Interior's "go to" guy in the field regarding all matters concerning wolves. On the surface, wolf recovery appears to have been a success, with the 66 reintroduced wolves growing to a population of approximately 1,700 wolves in 15 years.

While it is Wyoming's extreme management plan that was the basis of the recent August 5, 2010 re-listing ruling, it was the deal struck between the three states and the FWS before wolf reintroduction that has caused much of the delisting controversy. In order to reach an agreement with the states, Ed Bangs and the FWS presented a plan that agreed to maintain a minimum of 15 breeding pairs in each of the three states, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. This agreement minimum has been shown by the scientific community to be insufficient to ensure genetic connectivity between the states' wolf populations.

The immense controversy and subsequent political pressure that wolves command dictated that such a low bar be set in order to reach a deal for population recovery. Mr. Bangs himself said he thought the number was too low. But while he acknowledged that this recovery goal was inadequate, he has unwaveringly supported delisting at current population levels. However, it is clear that the states have no intention of allowing wolf populations to be maintained at current population levels, no matter how scientifically inadequate and biologically indefensible those levels are.

While some claim the current estimated regional population of 1,700 wolves is sufficient, the science regarding viable populations suggests it is not. Adding additional pressure is the stated objective of Idaho and Montana to actively reduce the number of wolves and manage a much smaller population, well below current levels, once management of the species is returned to their hands. Meanwhile, Wyoming's position is unwavering, with the clear intent to stick to their management plan that allows for all wolves to be shot on sight, year-round, without a license in all but the northwest corner of the state.

The science regarding genetics and presumptive Endangered Species Act (ESA) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listing standards support that a much larger population is needed before delisting. Within the delisting arena for all species, including the IUCN, the standard protocol recommends 50 breeders for short-term genetic viability, and 500 breeders for long-term genetic viability (the "50/500 rule"). That translates into 2,000-3,000 wolves required to maintain robust genetic viability over 100 years.

In an effort to prevent a premature delisting of the species, on May 9, 2007, a consortium of 247 scientists wrote a letter to Ed Bangs opposing the proposed delisting because the wolf population had yet to demonstrate long term genetic viability at its current level and, it was the states' intended goal to dramatically reduce current population levels. The letter explains that scientific consensus is that a population of "several thousands" is "needed to maintain genetic diversity for long-term survival."

The letter also states the following,

"Despite significant gains, the Northern Rockies wolf population still faces threats to recovery because of state proposals to eliminate a large number of wolves upon delisting, the population's relatively small size, and a lack of connectivity between wolves in Yellowstone, Idaho, and Northwestern Montana. Until actions are taken to adequately address these threats, we do not believe Endangered Species Act protections should be eliminated for the Northern Rockies gray wolf..."

Under the current delisting proposal, the states will be permitted to manage the wolves

at the minimum recovery goal of 300 wolves in 30 breeding pairs distributed across Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho...

...we understand that the governor of Idaho, C. L. Butch Otter, has vowed to expeditiously reduce the current number of wolves in his state from around 700 to the FWS's minimal standard of just 100 wolves for that state...

By any measure, a population of 30 breeding pairs (300 wolves) is insufficient to achieve an effective population size large enough to maintain essential genetic diversity."

In order to push delisting forward, the FWS has made bigger and bigger compromises in wolf management. These compromises have become increasingly less palatable to those exposed to the politics of wolf management and the growing body of scientific research that directly conflicts with the positions of state government officials and state wolf management policy. As time progresses, the FWS continues to avoid addressing the glaring problems faced by wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain states.

By design, species recovery plans under the ESA are advised to undergo a review every five years in order to revise the plans to incorporate the latest available scientific data. The Wolf Recovery Plan was signed in 1987. Since that time, 23 years ago, it has never undergone even one such review. With more than \$35 million of taxpayer money and considerable public interest already invested in wolf recovery, it would seem reasonable, at the least, that such reviews be conducted at the advised five-year interval rather than not at all.

State governors and regional legislators claim that the ESA is "broken" and "nonsensical," and that in the Northern Rockies we face a catastrophe with wolves "decimating" elk herds and livestock. In reality, the safety net of the ESA has simply demonstrated its purpose. Elk herds are sound and stable, and ranchers are learning to manage their livestock to minimize losses to wolves and other predators. And the remaining areas of the American West still wild enough to harbor healthy ecosystems, including wolves, are more balanced and complete than they have been in 70 years.

Now, because a federal judge rightfully upheld that the delisting of wolves, as it occurred, was in violation of the ESA, the ESA itself is under attack by a barrage of bills in both the U.S. House and Senate.

Legislatively delisting wolves will set a dangerous precedent for the Endangered Species Act. The ESA sets forth the procedure to list and delist species, including wolves, based upon the "best scientific ... data available." This procedure is not "broken" and does not need fixing. The FWS has the responsibility to adopt a scientifically defensible wolf

recovery plan and adhere to the ESA's provisions to delist Northern Rockies wolves, once their recovery is assured.

Legislatively delisting wolves and allowing politics rather than science to determine the status of any species, not only defies Secretary Salazar's order to ensure integrity of scientific process in departmental decision-making, but it undermines the ESA itself. After all, for what other reason than to protect all imperiled species that are in conflict with human interests was the ESA created?

Delisting Legislation

In the latter half of 2010, six bills were introduced on Capitol Hill that jeopardized both wolves and the ESA. Efforts to pass one of those bills failed on Tuesday, December 21, 2010, in the final hours of the lame duck session. U.S. Senators Jim Risch and Mike Crapo of Idaho presented the bill (S 3919), which was written by U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah. Seeking to bypass the committee process, they offered the bill for unanimous consent of the Senate. U.S. Senator Benjamin Cardin of Maryland was the first to object. Senator Cardin said the bill would undermine the Endangered Species Act and called it an attempt "to solve politically what should be done by good science." His objection put an end to wolf delisting bills in the 111th Congress.

However, there is good reason to believe that this effort is far from over. All indications suggest that, early in the 112th Congress, very similar bills will be resurrected and the push to legislatively delist wolves will vigorously resume. The probability that a wolf-delisting bill will be a rider to an Appropriations bill is high.

The ESA, and subsequent recovery plans for a species, clearly outline the terms of delisting. As standard protocol, procedural channels exist to regulate the delisting process. The ESA is in place to intervene when human interests and activities of commerce and land use interfere with the survival of a species. Legislatively delisting wolves and allowing politics rather than science to determine the status of a species undermines the ESA, setting a dangerous precedent for all imperiled species in the future.

Wolves may be the first species affected, but they will certainly not be the last.

The 2010 bills are listed below. If you have any difficulty loading these links, copy the address and paste it in your browser.

S 3864 (Senator Baucus - MT, with Senator Tester - MT)
http://www.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:s3864is.txt.pdf

S 3919 (Senator Hatch - UT, with Senators Risch and Crapo - ID and Senators Enzi and Barrasso - WY)
http://www.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:s3919is.txt.pdf

S 3825 (Senator Risch - ID, with Senator Crapo - ID)
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111s3825is/pdf/BILLS-111s3825is.pdf>

HR 6485 (Representative Bishop - UT, with Rep. Simpson - ID, Rep. Chaffetz - UT, Rep. Rehberg - MT, Rep. Lummis - WY, Rep. Franks - AZ, Rep. Herger - CA, and Rep. Heller - NV) <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr6485ih/pdf/BILLS-111hr6485ih.pdf>

HR 6486 (U.S. Rep. Bishop - UT, with Rep. Chaffetz - UT)
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr6486ih/pdf/BILLS-111hr6486ih.pdf>

HR 6028 (U.S. Rep. Edwards - TX)
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr6028ih/pdf/BILLS-111hr6028ih.pdf>

**Pending legislation is in a constant state of fluctuation. Please check federal websites for the most current information.*

The gray wolf is an iconic keystone species of the American West. Where careful, professional management of an endangered species is needed, in the case of wolves, often politics has hijacked science. This timeline illustrates the political tug-of-war that wolves in the Northern Rockies have been and are still being subjected to.

TIMELINE

1870-1877: During this seven-year period, 385,000 wolves are killed for a bounty paid by the U.S. Government.

1883-1918: In Montana alone, 80,730 wolves are exterminated.

1925: The West no longer has a viable wolf population, due to many decades of aggressive eradication programs.

1926: Officially, the last remaining wolves in Yellowstone National Park (YNP) are killed.

1935 – 1968: Park rangers find it necessary to shoot and export elk and other prey species to combat overpopulation.

1944: Aldo Leopold, the father of American conservation, recommends bringing wolves back to the park.

1966: Several biologists bring to the U.S. Congress the idea of returning wolves to YNP, concerned that critically high concentrations of elk are negatively impacting the ecosystem of the park.

January 4, 1974: Gray wolves are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the lower 48 states, except in Minnesota where they are listed as threatened.

1986 - early 1990s: Wolves from Canada are slowly but naturally reappearing in the West. The only recorded pack in the U.S. Northern Rockies, the Magic Pack, lives in Glacier National Park. However, their den site is on the Canadian side of the border. Other lone wolves, but no documented breeding pairs, are occasionally recorded in Montana, Idaho, Washington and Wyoming.

1987: The Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan is approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1995 - 1996: Under the ESA, based on the wolf recovery plan, 66 wolves are captured in Canada and reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho.

March 2002: Idaho releases the Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan prepared by the Idaho Legislative Wolf Oversight Committee and the Idaho Legislature. The plan calls for 10-15 breeding pairs.

2002, year-end: The Idaho, Montana and Wyoming wolf population is estimated to be 663.

April 1, 2003: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service releases a plan to down-list wolves in all or portions of nine Western states from endangered to threatened.

October 2003: Seventeen conservation groups file lawsuit arguing that the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to down-list wolves was not based on the “best available science,” as required by the ESA.

January 31, 2005: U.S. District Court Judge Robert Jones for the District of Oregon rules in favor of the conservation groups, ruling that the decision to down-list wolves was “arbitrary and capricious” and was not based upon “the best available science” as required by the ESA.

January 11, 2007: Idaho Governor “Butch” Otter says he will support public hunts to kill all but 100 of Idaho’s 650 wolves, or 85% of the state’s recovering population. 100 wolves is the absolute minimum allowed before they would be returned to Endangered Species Act protection. Otter’s comments are considered a clear indication that politics rather than science will drive wolf management in Idaho.

February 8, 2007: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to remove the Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf DPS (Distinct Population Segment) from the Endangered Species List through the Federal Register under 72 FR 6106. Once removed from the Endangered Species List, wolves will no longer receive protections of the ESA and management will be turned over from the federal government (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to the individual states and their game/wildlife agencies.

May 7, 2007: 247 independent scientists write a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expressing opposition to the February 8, 2007 delisting proposal, stating that the wolf population is not large enough to maintain long-term genetic viability and that the populations’ small size should not be subjected to “state proposals to eliminate a large number of wolves upon delisting.” The letter also explains that scientific consensus is

that a population of “several thousands” is “needed to maintain genetic diversity for long-term survival.”

2007, year-end – Nearly 13 years since reintroduction, the estimated wolf population in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming has grown to 1,513 wolves, still short of several thousands recommended by the scientists to ensure long-term genetic viability.

February 20, 2008: Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks proposes and outlines a wolf-hunting season for fall of 2008 and 2009.

February 21, 2008: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service files a delisting rule that would remove the Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf from the Endangered Species List, citing that “the wolf population in the Northern Rockies has far exceeded its recovery goal.”

March 6, 2008: The Idaho Fish and Game Commission votes on and adopts the Idaho Wolf Population Management Plan 2008-2012. It states that, “The goal of the IDFG plan is to ensure that populations are maintained at 2005-2007 population levels (518-732 wolves) during the 5-year post-delisting period...”

March 28, 2008: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisting rule takes effect. Idaho, Montana and Wyoming begin state management of wolves.

April 28, 2008: Twelve conservation groups sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in federal court over the delisting decision, requesting a preliminary injunction to stay the delisting until the outcome of the lawsuit is known.

May 2, 2008: Wyoming Game and Fish proposes a fall 2008 wolf-hunting season.

May 22, 2008: Idaho Department of Fish and Game sets wolf hunting seasons for fall of 2008.

March 28 – July 18, 2008: During this period, wolves are delisted in Wyoming and killed prior to typical hunting seasons, based on Wyoming’s predator laws. Under Wyoming’s plan, in 88% of the state, designated as the “Predatory Animal Area,” wolves can be shot year-round, without a license or “bag limit.”

July 18, 2008: U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy of Montana issues a preliminary injunction returning ESA protections to wolves, and eliminating both a 2008 hunting season and the liberal rules for wolf killing in Wyoming’s “Predatory Animal Area.” In a strongly worded 40-page order, the judge says the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision to delist wolves, “provides no new evidence or research to support its change of course,” and that, “Congress does not intend agency decision-making to be fickle. When

it is, the line separating rationality from arbitrariness and capriciousness is crossed.” Additionally, Judge Molloy said that the delisting decision, “demonstrated a possibility of irreparable harm” to the species and that the injunction will “ensure the species is not imperiled.”

September 17, 2008: The federal government officially withdraws the delisting rule of February 21, 2008, returning all Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolves to the endangered species list and federal protection and management.

2008, year-end: The Idaho, Montana and Wyoming wolf population is estimated to be 1,645.

January 14, 2009: The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, under the outgoing Bush Administration, announces that Northern Rockies wolves will be stripped of their Endangered Species Act protections in Montana and Idaho, but not in Wyoming.

January 20, 2009: The incoming Obama Administration suspends the proposed delisting rule for Montana and Idaho, pending review.

March 6, 2009: Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announces that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will follow the lead of the Bush Administration and remove wolves in the Northern Rockies and Greater Yellowstone region from Endangered Species Act protections. Management of wolves now moves to the individual states of Idaho and Montana. The wolves of Wyoming remain protected by the ESA due to Wyoming’s aggressive management plan.

March 9, 2009: President Obama signs the Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity to “restore scientific integrity in government decision making,” and to ensure that science rather politics guides environmental policy.

April 2, 2009: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisting rule is published in the Federal Register.

April 6, 2009: The Idaho Department of Fish and Game sets wolf hunting seasons for the fall of 2009.

May 4, 2009: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisting rule becomes official in Idaho and Montana. Wolves remain listed in Wyoming.

June 2, 2009: Thirteen conservation groups sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in federal court over the delisting decision.

July 8, 2009: Montana sets a quota for the first hunting season at 75.

August 17, 2009: Idaho sets a quota for the first wolf-hunting season at 220. Idaho Fish and Game commissioners state that they intend to manage wolf numbers to the “level of 520 wolves,” aiming at the low end of their Idaho Wolf Population Management Plan 2008-2012, rather than in the range called for in that same plan of 518-732 wolves. Many conservation groups see this as a telling sign of what new management objectives might be in the future, expecting the state to gradually whittle down the total population under newly instated state management.

August 20, 2009: Via a preliminary injunction, thirteen conservation groups ask a federal district court to block the fall wolf hunts.

August 31, 2009: U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy hears arguments seeking an injunction to halt the wolf-hunting season.

September 1, 2009: Idaho’s wolf-hunting season opens.

September 8, 2009: U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy denies the injunction sought. Hunting season to proceed.

September 15, 2009: Montana’s wolf-hunting season opens.

September 29, 2009: In response to the March 9, 2009 Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity, Interior Secretary Salazar issues an order to ensure integrity of scientific process in his department, which oversees the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

November 19, 2009: Idaho extends its wolf-hunting season by three additional months in zones where quotas were not yet filled.

2009, year-end: The Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Washington, Oregon and Utah wolf population is estimated to be 1,706.

September 1, 2009 - March 31, 2010: 260 wolves are killed in the Idaho and Montana hunting seasons. In Montana’s hunt, the average dead wolf weighs around 80 pounds, and 62% of the wolves killed in the hunt are pups or yearlings. The largest wolf killed in Montana weighs 117 pounds. Idaho’s hunt, by hunting season standards, spans a very long seven months in much of the state.

February 2010: Idaho Fish and Game releases the Wolf Conservation and Management in Idaho Progress Report 2009, containing a wolf “mortality study.” During the calendar year of 2009, the first year of legal wolf hunting, project biologists recorded 275 wolf

mortalities in Idaho. But scientists know that many more unreported wolves die that can't be counted. Therefore the only accurate way to determine actual total mortality was to conduct a study based on the wolves wearing radio collars. This study of radio-collared wolves shows not only the wolves that were killed and reported, but also all the unreported deaths accounting for poaching. When biologists then extrapolate and divide the pie based on the data from that sample, including the unreported deaths, then 504 wolves died in Idaho in 2009, not just 275. At the beginning of 2009, Idaho's total wolf population was estimated to be 856. This study therefore reveals the extent of "illegal take and wounding loss," including poaching. With a popular online blogging subculture, encouraging would-be wolf poachers to "aim for the guts" and "gut shoot" wolves, so they fatally wound the animal without killing it (keeping their one wolf quota hunting tag open), it is not cause for surprise that the figures of this study could be so high.

April 5, 2010: In a news release, Idaho Fish and Game states that it intends to manage wolf populations at the 2005 level of 518 wolves. With Idaho's 2009 year-end population at 843, this represents a 38.5% decrease. This does not account for the annual population boost of annual spring litters. Now Idaho Fish and Game is targeting the absolute lowest figure set in their Idaho Wolf Population Management Plan 2008-2012.

July 8, 2010: Montana sets their 2010 wolf hunt quota at 186, approximately a 250% increase from the 2009 quota of 75.

July 9, 2010: Idaho Fish and Game announces that it will allow for trapping and electronic calls in the 2010 wolf-hunting season.

August 5, 2010: A ruling by U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy protects Northern Rockies wolves again, putting them back on the federal Endangered Species List, removing wolf management from the individual states and returning it to the hands of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Latter half of 2010: In response to the federal court's ruling, a barrage of appeals are filed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the states of Montana and Idaho, the Idaho and Montana Farm Bureau federations and other special interest groups, including the NRA, Safari Club International and Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife. Additionally, six bills are introduced into the U.S. House and Senate, seeking to legislatively remove wolves from ESA protection.

October 18, 2010: Idaho Governor "Butch" Otter announces in the midst of his re-election campaign that he refuses to manage or protect wolves regardless of the judge's ruling. Otter sends a letter to Interior Secretary Salazar announcing that Idaho "will not manage wolves as the designated agent of the federal government." In calling off all law enforcement with

respect to wolves, he writes that Idaho will no longer “perform statewide monitoring of wolves, conduct investigations into illegal killings, provide state law enforcement in response to illegal takings or implement the livestock depredation response program.”

November 18, 2010: U.S. District Judge, Alan Johnson of the United States District Court for the District of Wyoming rules that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wasn’t justified in rejecting Wyoming’s wolf management plan. The judge ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should revisit whether Wyoming’s proposed “trophy game” management area is adequate to maintain a healthy wolf population or whether the area should be expanded.

December 8, 2010: In a telephone conference call, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission suspend their Wolf Population Management Plan 2008-2012 and revert back to the 2002 Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. Rather than managing for 518 wolves, the low-end figure of the 2008-2012 management plan, the state is now following the 2002 plan which calls for 10-15 breeding pairs.

December 21, 2010: On the second-to-last day of the lame duck session of the 111th Congress, Idaho Senators Jim Risch and Mike Crapo carry Senate Bill 3919, written by Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, to the Senate floor, seeking to bypass the committee process and offer the bill for unanimous consent. Senator Benjamin Cardin of Maryland objects, saying the bill would undermine the Endangered Species Act. Cardin criticizes the bill, calling it an attempt, “to solve politically what should be done by good science.”

January 2011: More bills seeking to legislatively delist wolves are anticipated in the early sessions of the 112th Congress. The probability that a wolf-delisting bill will be a rider to an appropriations bill is high.