

**Earthjustice • Defenders of Wildlife
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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
Hells Canyon Preservation Council**

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**Interior Secretary Salazar Finalizes Wolf Delisting;
Conservation groups will challenge the removal of essential federal protections**

Washington, D.C.— An advance copy of the Federal Register — released today — contains a final version of the federal government’s decision to eliminate Endangered Species Act protections for wolves in the Northern Rockies except for those in Wyoming. The delisting effort revives an effort launched by the Bush administration which was halted in January for review when the Obama administration took office. Today’s delisting decision is the second time in twelve months the federal government has removed federal protections for wolves in the Northern Rockies. Conservation groups, represented by Earthjustice, successfully sued to get the protections reinstated in July 2008.

Delisting wolves means they will be subject to state-sponsored wolf control efforts and hunting this year unless stopped by legal action. Idaho and Montana plan to allow hundreds of wolves to be shot.

The decision to lift wolf protections comes as Yellowstone Park wolves declined by 27 percent in the last year – one of the largest declines reported since wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone in 1995. The northern Rockies wolf population also has not achieved a level of connectivity between the greater Yellowstone, central Idaho, and northwest Montana areas that is essential to wolves’ long-term survival. After delisting, the northern Rockies wolf population may be allowed to drop to only 300 to 450 wolves.

Wolves will remain under federal control in Wyoming because a federal court previously ruled that Wyoming’s hostile wolf management scheme leaves wolves in “serious jeopardy.” The Fish and Wildlife Service in the recent past held that a state-by-state approach to delisting wolves was not permitted under the Endangered Species Act, including in their earlier decision to not delist wolves without Wyoming’s inclusion. In today’s delisting decision, the federal government flip flops on its earlier position.

In addition to Wyoming, Idaho and Montana have refused to make enforceable commitments to maintain viable wolf populations within their borders. On the very day the first wolf delisting took effect in March, 2008, Idaho Governor Butch Otter signed a law allowing Idaho citizens to kill wolves without a permit whenever wolves are annoying, disturbing, or “worrying” livestock or domestic animals. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission established rules that would have allowed 428 wolves to be killed in 2008 alone had the court not returned wolves to the endangered species list. Montana also authorized a fall wolf hunt.

Conservation groups, represented by Earthjustice, will send the Fish and Wildlife Service a notice that the delisting violates the Endangered Species Act tomorrow. If the agency does not reconsider the delisting rule, the conservation groups will again ask a federal court to reinstate federal Endangered Species Act protections for wolves in the northern Rockies until wolf numbers are stronger and the states pledge to responsibly manage wolves.

Earthjustice represents 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, Wildlands Project, and Hells Canyon Preservation Council.

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“We look forward to celebrating the transfer of wolves to state management but not until a federal delisting rule is developed that ensures the future of wolves in the region. This plan ignores current science on what wolves need to maintain a healthy population over the long term. It also ignores the hundreds of thousands of citizens who have asked for a better plan,” said *Suzanne Stone, Northern Rockies Representative for Defenders of Wildlife.*

“Last time the Service removed legal protections, there was an all out war on wolves in the weeks that followed,” said *Louisa Willcox, Director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s* office in Livingston, Mont. “We are so incredibly close to fulfilling the conditions necessary to declare the wolves’ comeback as complete, but this move threatens to undo what should be an incredible conservation success story.”

"We are disappointed that this early in the new administration, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar choose to ignore sound science and instead chose to pursue a piecemeal delisting plan for the Northern Rockies gray wolf population. It makes no sense to segment an already fragmented population with two different management plans. Taking away Endangered Species Act protection from wolves in Montana and Idaho while keeping Wyoming's wolves under federal protection completely ignores the best population and ecosystem science. In addition, we firmly believe that the three states' management plans will lead to the unwarranted death of hundreds of wolves. As much as we wish to have the states manage their wolves, they simply haven't developed adequate management plans, and the federal government is acting irresponsibly by proposing delisting under these circumstances,” said *Franz Camenzind of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance.*

"We are disappointed the new administration has missed this opportunity to rethink the failed wolf persecution policies of the last eight years," said *Jonathan Lovvorn*, vice president and chief counsel for animal protection litigation with *The Humane Society of the United States*. "The federal government's efforts to strip wolves of all federal protection have been repeatedly struck down by the courts, and this latest rule is no more likely to succeed than the previous failed attempts."

"Rather than fix the problems identified in the last lawsuit, the Fish and Wildlife Service decided to try to paper over them," said *Doug Honnold* of *Earthjustice*, who represented the conservation group plaintiffs in the prior wolf delisting lawsuit. "We will go to court again to try to stop the wolf killing planned by Idaho and Montana."