



A stay for wolves as Obama stops last-minute Bush rules

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Amid the fanfare of the inauguration, President Barack Obama went to work on Tuesday, and among his first acts was to stop pending last-minute regulation changes by his predecessor.

The move gave the endangered Rocky Mountain Gray Wolves yet another reprieve in the arduous, years-long battle over whether or not they should continue to receive federal protection.

In recent months, the Bush Administration has pushed through a succession of new rules and regulations, many aimed at environmental projects, trying to beat the clock on its expiring reign. (It's not an unusual game. Bill Clinton also made many last minute changes - that were later stopped by Bush.)

These Bush Administration tinkering aimed to keep some of Bush's and Vice President Dick Cheney's pet ideas alive by empowering federal agencies to bypass certain scientific review requirements for developments in forests, near power plants and dams; conscripting the Endangered Species Act so it cannot be used to fight global warming and overturning a ban on loaded firearms in national parks.

On Jan. 14, the Bush Administration started the process (for the second time within a year) to remove federal protections for the gray wolves that populate the Northern Rocky Mountains.

But the Obama action temporarily halts any change in the wolves' status by derailing those last-minute regulations that have not yet been published in the Federal Register, a requirement for activation.

The move gives the new administration time to review the situation - a temporary reprieve, says Andrew Wetzler, a wildlife expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"It thus falls to conservationists to convince the President that wolves still need protection. I'm confident that this is an argument we can win," Wetzler writes in [his blog](#). "The new Secretary of Interior, Ken Salazar, has already [publicly committed](#) that the Administration will rely on sound science when managing wildlife..."

In spring 2008, the Bush Administration successfully delisted the wolves from the Endangered Species Act protections. But a consortium of environmental groups sued and won a reprieve, putting the issue back in the hands of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department in the fall.

The recovering gray wolves, which number an estimated 1,500 in the upper Rocky Mountain region of the United States, were brought back from virtual extinction with a recovery plan that began in 1995. Many wolf experts worry that they would not survive the sport hunting and predator “control” measures planned in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming if federal protections are removed.

“Rather than remove protections from wolves in a piecemeal fashion, in the isolated locations where they have finally begun to recover from past persecution, the Obama administration should develop and implement a national gray-wolf recovery plan that will ensure the survival of these magnificent animals,” said Michael Robinson, an advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The reprieve also applies to wolves in the Great Lakes region, which were part of the Bush delisting, though those wolves are more plentiful. They are considered “threatened,” a lesser level of protection than afforded those animals considered to be “endangered.”