

Gray wolf to remain regulated until rules can be reviewed

By [Lee Bergquist](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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The hand of the new administration quickly touched Wisconsin and the gray wolf when President Barack Obama on Tuesday signed an executive order providing time to review pending actions affecting the environment and other areas of government.

The order means that the wolf - whose numbers are growing in Wisconsin - will remain regulated under the Endangered Species Act until rules removing key protections can be re-examined.

Last week, the Interior Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said they had rewritten the regulations affecting the treatment of wolves in the Upper Midwest and several Rocky Mountain states to satisfy objections raised by federal judges.

The judges were ruling on lawsuits by environmental groups that challenged an earlier decision that took the wolf off the Endangered Species List for more than a year in the Midwest.

Removing the wolf from the list allowed the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to issue permits to landowners to kill wolves that were shown to be killing livestock or pets.

Judge sought clarification

Wisconsin had the authority between March 2007 and September 2008. But wolves were relisted after a judge in Washington, D.C., sought clarification on how officials could remove protections where wolves are recovering, but not everywhere in their native range.

Last week's decision had been applauded by the DNR and hunting and farming groups, which worried that wolves are harming livestock and attacking hunting dogs and pets.

Obama's action will allow the Interior Department time to stop the regulation of wolves in "piecemeal fashion," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity in Pinos Altos, N.M. He said wolves still remain absent from 95% of their historic range.

In Wisconsin, the wolf population has grown from 250 in 2000 to an estimate of 537 to 564 last winter, according to the DNR.

The agency goal for recovery is 350 wolves.

The latest development has no immediate effect, according to Adrian Wydeven, a wolf ecologist with the DNR.

But if Obama's review continues until spring, he said, conflict between wolves and property owners could once again rise.

Wolf attacks on livestock and other domestic animals tend to increase in spring after wolves have litters and need more food for their young, he said.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the agency hopes the review will move quickly.

"It is really just a delay, in our minds, so the administration can take some time to come up to speed," said Laura Ragan, a biologist for the agency.

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