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## ENDANGERED SPECIES: FWS rejects bid to bring wolves to New England

Patrick Reis, E&E reporter

The Fish and Wildlife Service rejected a petition this week that sought to bring gray wolves back to the Northeast.

New England residents had petitioned the agency to declare that a population of gray wolves exists in the Northeast and that it needed protection under the Endangered Species Act. The petition targeted Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and New York.

The petition requested a federal plan to restore wolves in a region where they were exterminated by the late 1800s. The proposal notes that wolves migrating from Canada have been killed in northern New England over the past several decades.

But the service ruled Wednesday the petition failed to present enough evidence to warrant a full investigation into the wolves' status. The agency defines a population as two pairs, producing at least two young a year for two years.

"While the occurrence of [occasional wolves in the Northeast] raises the theoretical possibility that a population could exist, it does not constitute substantial information that a population may actually exist," agency biologists wrote.

Environmentalists who petitioned for action on the wolf disagreed with the service's decision.

"I believe it's possible we have a breeding population. I also believe it's possible we don't," said Daryl DeJoy, executive director of the Wildlife

Alliance of Maine, which supported the petition. "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack."

Mollie Matteson of the Center for Biological Diversity's Vermont office said that while it is difficult to imagine breeding wolves could exist in the region without being discovered, the Fish and Wildlife Service committed to recovering gray wolves when it listed them as endangered species in the lower 48 states in 1978.

The service has successfully reintroduced wolves in the Northern Rockies -- the species in Montana and Idaho were removed from the Endangered Species List last year after the regional population neared 1,500 -- and in Great Lakes states.

The service, Matteson said, could trap wolves in Canada and release them in the Northeast, much as it did in Yellowstone National Park.

"There is extensive habitat for wolves in the Northeast," Matteson said. "The only obstacle [to their return] is leadership and a clear plan for their recovery."

Martin Miller, who heads the Fish Wildlife Service's endangered species division in the Northeast, said Matteson's view overstates the service's obligations. By law, a species is considered recovered when it is no longer in danger of extinction or is unlikely to become endangered in the foreseeable future, he said.

Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman Diana Weaver said the agency is not considering reintroducing wolves in the Northeast. "It is not something that we are even contemplating by any means at this time," she said.