

Rolling Stone

Congress Yanks Protection for Endangered Gray Wolf

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JEAN-CHRISTOPHE VERHAEGEN/AFP/Getty

"The days of science taking a back seat," Barack Obama declared upon taking office in 2009, "are over. Strong rhetoric. But – as the curious case of the no-longer-endangered gray wolf has shown – empty.

It was the Bush administration that first moved to strip the grey wolf of the Rockies of its endangered species protection. The decision to "delist" the wolf was made in one of the infamous "midnight rules" – written as the scientifically bankrupt administration was turning out the lights.

The Bush rule invented out of whole cloth the right to subdivide a protected species by state, in this case, declaring the wolf

"recovered" everywhere but within the state borders of Wyoming.

The wolf gained a brief reprieve when Obama first took office and suspended all of Bush's 11th-hour rulemaking. But less than three months later, Obama Interior Secretary Ken Salazar – himself the scion of a ranching family – did western cattlemen a solid by rubber stamping his predecessor's bunk science.

Environmentalists sued, and beat Salazar & Co. in federal court: In August 2010, a judge vacated Salazar's delisting as "a political solution" and reinstated protection for the wolf across the Rockies.

That decision was still under appeal when Congress and the administration stepped in to declare open season on the gray wolf in this April's government-shutdown-averting budget deal. Republicans, Democrats, and President Obama banded together to kick science to the curb and cripple the Endangered Species Act as a rider to an appropriations bill.

"The rider is not only a disaster for wolves but for any endangered species that a politician doesn't like," says Noah Greenwald of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Congress has set a terrible precedent."