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## Group to sue U.S. to force gray wolf protection

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An environmental group is planning to sue the U.S. government to force a recovery plan for gray wolves throughout the United States.

The Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity filed notice Tuesday of its intent to sue the Department of Interior within 60 days if the agency doesn't start planning to expand wolf ranges in the lower 48 states. It said suitable habitats exist in the Pacific Northwest, California, Great Basin, southern Rocky Mountains, Great Plains and New England.

"Wolves are an integral part of this country's natural history and need a national recovery plan now," said Noah Greenwald, the center's endangered species director, in a statement. "Although wolves have made important strides toward recovery in parts of the northern Rockies and Great Lakes, these areas represent less than 5 percent of their historic range."

Gray wolves, once nearly hunted and poisoned into extermination, were added to the Endangered Species Act in 1973. They cannot be hunted in the lower 48 states.



A pack of gray wolves roams Isle Royale National Park in northern Michigan in February 2006. By John Vucetich, AP

In recent years, some states have demanded their federal protections be lifted, but the center and other conservation groups have successfully sued to prevent that.

The center's announcement said wolves benefit prey populations by culling sick animals and preventing overpopulation. It said wolves reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park helped pronghorn and foxes by controlling coyote populations and benefited songbirds and beavers by dispersing elk and allowing recovery of stream side vegetation.