

## Closely watched lone wolf quits California for Oregon

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**(Reuters) - Apparently OR-7 has a cold, wet nose for the Pacific Northwest.**

The lone gray wolf by that name has returned home to Oregon, after captivating biologists and wildlife lovers by becoming the first of his species found in California in over 80 years, officials said on Friday.

OR-7, which arrived in California in late December, crossed back over the state line into Oregon on Thursday, according to the California Department of Fish and Game. The wolf is fitted with a radio collar tracked by biologists.

The wolf's trek in search of a mate and prey has gained it many fans, and the animal has won attention for environmental groups seeking to force California to better protect other gray wolves that may venture into the state.

"Folks can't get enough of learning about this animal, and what he's done is pretty spectacular," said Steve Pedery, conservation director for the environmental group Oregon Wild.

Before OR-7 set foot in California, the last gray wolf known to live in the state was an old and emaciated animal slain in 1924, state officials and environmentalists said.

OR-7, which left a wolf pack in the Eagle Cap Wilderness in northeast Oregon in September, trekked over 1,000 miles at the end of last year to get to California. Including the miles it roamed while in California, it has ranged over 2,000 miles, officials said.

"This animal exhibited a tremendous capacity to make large movements very quickly," said Karen Kovacs, California Department of Fish and Game wildlife program manager for the area where the wolf was living.

In California, the wolf has ranged across grasslands, open sagebrush and forests and mostly kept clear of rural residences, she said.

### LEAVING THE PACK

There are at least 29 wolves living in Oregon, Pedery said. Meanwhile, the pack OR-7 comes from has faced some setbacks.

It numbered at least 14 wolves in late 2010, but some animals including OR-7 set off for new territory, Pedery said. Amid complaints the pack was preying on cattle, Oregon wildlife officials had been set to kill OR-7's father as they had other wolves in the pack, but environmentalists won a court order to prevent that action, Pedery said.

Meanwhile, OR-7's arrival in California could herald an eventual repopulation of the species in the state, as has happened in recent years in Oregon and Washington states, said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

The Center and other environmental groups this week petitioned California to create a plan to protect gray wolves. They will continue in that effort even though OR-7 has left the state, Greenwald said.

After OR-7 began its epic trek, Oregon Wild created an online competition to name the animal.

With suggestions coming in from as far away as Finland and Nigeria, the name Journey was chosen in January, Pedery said. Public school teachers in Oregon have made keeping tabs on OR-7's movements a classroom activity for kids, he said.

As for OR-7's quest to find a mate, that appears to be a bust so far. His closest, potential female companions are likely in Idaho, northeast Oregon or the Cascade Mountain Range in Washington state, Greenwald said.

Kovacs said whenever biologists found OR-7s footprints, there were never any nearby prints from another wolf.