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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

## Lone wolf's arrival leads to protection petition

Peter Fimrite  
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A petition to protect the gray wolf under the California Endangered Species Act was filed Monday by four conservation groups eager to see the world's top canine predator re-established in the Golden State.

The petition was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Big Wildlife, the Environmental Protection Information Center and the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center amid intensive statewide interest in the first wolf to enter California in almost 90 years.

The wolf, known as OR7 because he originally came from Oregon, has traveled about 1,000 miles over dense forests and mountainous terrain. He has been tracked by game officials using signals from his GPS collar through Lassen and Shasta counties. The wolf is now in Siskiyou County, close to the Oregon border.

The move by the environmental groups requires the California Department of Fish and Game to review whether wolves should be considered for protected status. The Fish and Game Commission would make the final determination after a yearlong review process.

Gray wolves in California and other areas of their historic range are already protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. Adding them to the state listing would enhance their protection, requiring fish and game officials to prepare a wolf recovery plan, specify a target population and come up with ways to manage conflicts, including livestock depredation.



Allen Daniels / Associated Press

OR7, also known as Journey, traveled about 1,000 miles and is now in Siskiyou County.

### Crucial habitat

"The return of the gray wolf to California is exciting - it's a cause for celebration," said Noah Greenwald, the endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity. "The West Coast is crucial to wolf recovery in the United States, and California has hundreds of square miles of excellent wolf habitat. But if that one wolf is to become many, wolves need help so they don't get killed."

Wolves were exterminated in the lower 48 states, except Minnesota, in the 19th and early 20th centuries largely to protect livestock. The last known native California wolf was trapped and killed in Lassen County in 1924.

In the mid-1990s, 66 Canadian wolves were released in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in an attempt to bring the apex predator back. There are now more than 1,700 gray wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains. They have since moved into northeastern Oregon, where there are 29 wolves in four packs.

Last spring, the northern Rocky Mountain wolf population was removed from the endangered species list, but that does not include wolves in California. The delisting has resulted in more hunting of the canine carnivores, particularly in Idaho and Montana.

### **Looking for mate**

California's wolf, also known as Journey, left what is known as the Imnaha Pack in Wallowa County, Ore., last year and crossed the California state line in December, apparently looking for a mate so he could start a new pack.

The historic journey is being followed intently by conservation groups, ranchers, farmers and hunters throughout the state.

Ranchers, the primary opponents of wolves, point out that OR7's former pack mates have killed 21 cows and calves over the past two years. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife killed two of the culprits and were planning to cull two other wolves, including the pack leader - OR7's father - before conservation groups filed a lawsuit.

Greenwald said wolves will need protection under the state's Endangered Species Act because, even though they are protected federally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service never established any wolf management protocols.

The push for more protection comes as California's lone wolf appears to be contemplating a return to Oregon.

"The fact that he got here and that there are increasing numbers of wolves in Oregon and Washington indicates that it is only a matter of time before wolves head back into California and establish a pack," Greenwald said. "The return of wolves to California will help restore the natural balance and reverse the historic wrong done by people who shot, poisoned and persecuted wolves into oblivion."