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New Poll: Americans Love Wolves and Want Them to Stay Protected

NOAH GREENWALD

Endangered species program director,
Center for Biological Diversity

Wolves today live in just five percent of their historic range -- hardly enough to consider them recovered in the lower 48 states.

Our top scientists know that.

Apparently most Americans know it too.

A new national poll shows that just one in three Americans support the Obama administration's plan to drop Endangered Species protections for wolves across most of the U.S.

The poll's findings demonstrate that a majority of voters understand and support what our leading wolf researchers are telling us -- that wolves have not recovered and should be returned to hundreds of thousands of acres of prime but uninhabited wolf territory in places like California, the Northwest, southern Rockies and Northeast.

The poll shows that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe wolves are a "vital part of America's wilderness and natural heritage," and should be allowed to play their role in nature. Such views are supported by decades of research showing that wolves create a cascade of changes that benefit a wide range of species, including songbirds, fishes, foxes, pronghorn and many others.

With such strong support for wolves, particularly among Obama voters, it defies reason that the president is moving forward with stripping protections.

Opposition to wolf recovery in the U.S. has always been driven not by science or an intolerance of wolves among the majority of Americans but by well-connected special interests in the livestock and big-game hunting industries. As a result, despite the fact that taxpayers in most states reimburse livestock operators for wolf-caused losses (which amount to a tiny fraction of 1 percent of overall livestock losses), the political influence of wolf opponents continues to trump logic, science and the will of the American people.

As this latest poll makes obvious, the vast majority of voting Americans understands what our politicians are determined to ignore - that it's a national embarrassment to claim wolf populations in the lower 48 are healthy and recovered, particularly when aggressive hunting and trapping seasons designed to drastically reduce populations have been enacted in states where federal protections have already been removed. The new poll indicates only 1 in 3 Americans favor these hunting and trapping practices that in the past two years have resulted in the killing of more than 1,800 wolves.

There is simply no doubt that the majority of American voters like many of the nation's leading scientists don't support the plan to strip wolves of Endangered Species Act protections.

The question is, is the Obama administration even listening?

I have to hope so. We've come way too far in our efforts to recover these magnificent animals to give up now.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking comments through Sept. 11 on the plan to drop wolf protections.

It's an opportunity for Americans across the country to let the Obama administration know that wolves still matter, that science still matters, and that the irreplaceable wild places that have long defined the American spirit are not a political bargaining chip to be sold to the highest bidder.

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