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Gray wolf to lose endangered species protection as numbers rise



Yellowstone National Park/AP - A gray wolf is seen on the run near Blacktail Pond in Yellowstone National Park in Park County, Wyo. The Obama administration on Friday proposed lifting federal protections for gray wolves across most of the Lower 48 states.

By Lenny Bernstein,
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“Our analysis suggests the gray wolf no longer faces the threat of extinction and no longer requires the protection of the Endangered Species Act,” Dan Ashe, the wildlife agency’s director, said at a news conference Friday.

At the same time, Ashe’s agency proposed listing Mexican wolves as an endangered species. Despite efforts to revive that population, so there are only 75 Mexican wolves in Arizona and New Mexico.

Publication of the new rule in the Federal Register will trigger a 90-day comment period. If the rule goes into effect, the wolves would be subject to the management policies of individual states, some of which have been complaining that revived packs of gray wolves have been preying on livestock.

Some conservation groups immediately criticized the proposal. “This is like kicking a patient out of the hospital when they’re still attached to life support,” Noah Greenwald, endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a news release. “Wolves cling to a sliver of their historic habitat in the lower 48, and now the Obama administration wants to arbitrarily declare victory and move on.”

Gray wolves were wiped out of the western United States by the 1930s and from the western Great Lakes by the middle of the century, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1995, the agency launched a program to revive the species by introducing 66 wolves from southwestern Canada into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho.

Ashe called the effort “one of the most remarkable successes in the history of wildlife conservation.”