

California set to deny protections for gray wolves

Tim Hearden
November 19, 2013

.A preliminary study by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife finds there isn't a need to give the gray wolf protections under the state Endangered Species Act, mainly because no wolf populations have yet been established in the state.

SACRAMENTO — Wildlife officials in California appear to be preparing to deny state Endangered Species Act protections for the gray wolf.

A preliminary study by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife finds there isn't a need for such a listing, partly because no wolf populations are established here, said Eric Loft, chief of the agency's wildlife branch.

"We tentatively indicated to the peer reviewers ... that we don't think



A gray wolf is seen in this file photo.

John and Karen Hollingsworth/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

it's warranted," Loft said. "But it remains to be seen whether or not that's going to be the final conclusion depending on the peer review comments."

The study is being reviewed by outside scientists, then the agency will prepare a final document and send it to the state Fish and Game Commission, perhaps by its February meeting, Loft said. The Center for Biological Diversity and other environmental groups requested the petition last year, shortly after the arrival of OR-7, the first known gray wolf in California in decades. That wolf has since returned to Oregon.

In an initial review of the petition last year, state officials wrote that the environmental groups had failed to submit materials to support its claims. However, the department was still required by law to evaluate the petition.

Amaroq Weiss, the Center for Biological Diversity's West Coast wolf organizer, said she was told by a state official that the agency was leaning toward denying the petition because there are no wolf populations in California.

She said she believes wolves will gain protections here eventually, as they're almost certain to migrate south from Oregon. When they do, another petition will be filed, she said.

"Wolves are going to get listed in California, whether it's now or later," Weiss said. "I think that their listing is certain eventually from the fact that more wolves are going to be coming here in the future."

Weiss noted the Department of Fish and Wildlife spent two years studying wolves before the arrival of OR-7, and have spent nearly two more years studying the issue since the petition was filed in February 2012.

"Having spent four years, it would be a waste of time to turn their backs on the issue," she said. "It's going to come back."

The petition comes as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is gathering public input on a proposal to remove federal Endangered Species Act protections for the gray wolf in the lower 48 states. A public hearing here was slated for Nov. 22.

Loft said the federal proposal could impact the Fish and Game Commission's decision.

"I'm sure the Fish and Game Commission will take whatever the federal listing situation is and evaluate it," he said.