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## The Verdict:

## Science Behind Stripping Wolf Protections Fatally Flawed

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In a damning rebuke of the Obama administration's plans to strip Endangered Species Act protections from gray wolves across most of the lower 48, a panel of five independent scientists has unanimously concluded that it is not supported by the "best available science."

Appointed by the government to review the proposal, the five scientists found that a major underpinning of the proposal to remove protections did not reflect current science. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service argued that the gray wolf never occurred in 29 eastern states, but rather that a different species of wolf known as the eastern wolf did, and thus that the gray wolf should never have been protected at a national level in the first place.

Support for this conclusion was always tenuous -- it was based on an analysis solely by agency staff and published in an agency journal that had not been active in years -- but the review released this week is certainly the nail in the coffin.

The implications of that finding are far-reaching, suggesting that before federal protections can be removed for wolves across most of the country there must be much broader evidence of recovery.

So, what now?

No science, no delisting proposal, right?

That's what the Endangered Species Act requires. But it'll be up to the Obama administration to decide whether to follow the law or the politics.

The facts -- and political motivations -- are now clear: Wolves occupy a mere five percent of their historic range and in places where protections have already been removed, states have enacted aggressive anti-wolf hunting and trapping seasons that in just two-to-three years have resulted in the death of more than 2,600 wolves.

Hatred and persecution of wolves was the primary reason they were nearly driven off the map in the lower 48 states -- down to fewer than 1,000 wolves limited to northeastern Minnesota. Their comeback has been a tremendous success, but it is not complete and although most Americans admire wolves, old prejudices persist among a minority.

Nowhere has this been more obvious than in Idaho, where more than 900 wolves have already been killed, and in recent weeks the state hired a bounty hunter to kill all the wolves in two packs in one of the nation's

largest and most remote wilderness areas simply because hunters complained that the wolves were killing too many elk.

It would be unfortunate if we allowed politics and special interests to trump science in guiding our wildlife management policies.

And unless the Obama administration reverses course and follows the advice of the best science to preserve Endangered Species Act protections for America's wolves, we can be sure the bloodbath will continue and wolves will once again be pushed toward the brink of extinction.