

The New York Times

Protection for Wolves Is Restored in Wyoming

By MICHAEL WINES
SEPT. 23, 2014

A federal judge restored Endangered Species Act protection for wolves in Wyoming on Tuesday, ruling that the federal Fish and Wildlife Service accepted a state commitment to maintain the wolf population without requiring adequate safeguards.

The state's wolf-management plan declared the wolf a trophy-game animal, allowing seasonal hunting in some areas, and labeled it a predator that could be shot in four-fifths of the state.

In United States District Court in Washington, Judge Amy Berman Jackson ruled that the wildlife service's judgment that the wolf was no longer imperiled in much of its range was reasonable. She also deferred to the wildlife service's judgment that the wolf was not unduly threatened by Wyoming's decision to brand it a predator, noting that its numbers were small or nonexistent in much of the area covered by that designation.



A federal judge restored Endangered Species Act protection for wolves in Wyoming on Tuesday. Credit: US Fish & Wildlife, via Associated Press

But she said that the state's management plan was inadequate and unenforceable and that federal officials were "arbitrary and capricious" in accepting it.

Her ruling requires that the wolves remain under federal protection until Wyoming officials devise an enforceable proposal to maintain their numbers.

Bonnie Rice, a senior representative for the Sierra Club's Wild America campaign, said Judge Berman's ruling recognized that Wyoming's management plan had "very big flaws."

"We think the court is right to require them to develop a plan that's more science-based and doesn't treat wolves as vermin in the majority of the state," she said.

Conservationists and officials in the nation's mountain states, where many ranchers consider wolves a threat to livestock,

have contested the fate of the gray wolf for years. In Idaho, where federal protection also has been lifted, the state has established a board to limit the population.

The Obama administration ended federal protection for the wolf in Wyoming in late 2012, but it required the state to maintain at least 10 breeding pairs and 100 wolves outside Yellowstone National Park.

Some 270 wolves lived outside Yellowstone at the time, and the population since has increased to 306, said Noah Greenwald, the endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that sued the wildlife service.

But in the first year after federal protection for the wolf was lifted, he said, 62 wolves were killed by trophy hunters, and an unknown number were shot or trapped in areas where the animal was declared a predator.

“That’s no way to manage an endangered species,” Mr. Greenwald said in an interview.

Since lifting protection for the wolf in Wyoming, the Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to end protection for wolves everywhere else except in southern Arizona and New Mexico, where one species, the Mexican wolf, remains scarce. A small population in North Carolina would also remain under protection.