



Environmental experts, activists look toward future after wolf delisting

by Mackenzie Quinn
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BUTTE, Mont. — Thursday night, gray wolves were officially removed from the Endangered Species List it was proposed back in 2019. The removal comes after a peer review of gray wolf populations showed the exponential growth of the population in multiple regions.

“Wolves across Northern Rocky Mountains and Great Lakes region have grown to healthy population levels and continue to expand where suitable habitats exist,” the review says.

In March 2008, Montana removed gray wolves from their Endangered Species list after Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks found that a minimum of 497 wolves were living in Montana, of which 34 were breeding pairs. Since then, the gray wolf population has grown to roughly 900, even with wolf hunting seasons enacted.

FWP found during 2019, a total of 298 gray wolf deaths were due to legal hunting activities. However, the peer review regarding the removal from the list says illegal kills are still unreported and, “continues to be an important factor in recovering wolf populations.”

“In places where wolves live, we’ll see hundreds of wolves suffer and die to benefit the livestock industry and trophy hunters,” said Collette Adkins, carnivore conservation director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “In places where wolves have not yet recovered, we’ll see that progress halt.”

Adkins argued that wolves once inhabited all the United States, and in areas like the Southern Rockies or Pacific Northwest they have not shown significant signs of population rejuvenation.

“The Endangered Species Act should be your emergency room visit,” said Kaitlynn Glover, executive director of the Public Lands Council. “This is an emergent tool that you should use only when things are emergent. For environmental groups or activist groups to parse out this one animal simply because they have an emotional attachment ... it doesn’t follow logic; it doesn’t follow science.”

Glover attests that, due to success and stability in most prominent states, it is now the responsibility of states to continue to keep the wolf population healthy.

“Without question, states are well equipped -- and often best equipped -- to manage these wildlife species,” said Glover.

“They have intimate knowledge of their landscapes in a way that federal agencies often don’t. Certainly, there is value in federal law and federal regulation, like the Endangered Species Act, to facilitate some of this critical care that we see, but without question this is a prime example of a place where states can succeed. They’re set up for success. They have the most personal relationships with sportsmen, with conservationists, with the activists and with ranchers to make sure that all of their state objectives meet the needs of their local community.”

However, that local community has not stopped conservation groups from feeling the removal is abrupt.

“What troubles me is all these decades of work towards recovering this magnificent animal could be lost by this hasty and short-sighted decision that removes protections in place where we could have wolves return,” Adkins said. “We’re already seeing so many species pushed to the brink of extinction because of our greed, our consumption of land or resources. We need to take some commonsense steps to address these fundamental threats to our way of life. Habitat loss, pollution and climate change. With wolves, it’s easy to allow their recovery. We just need to keep them protected from being shot.” The final delisting ruling stands, and Glover notes now they will have a five-year period where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be checking in with states to monitor population size and movement.

Local groups say they are planning to file a lawsuit.

“1.8 million people opposed the removal of wolf protections, but those concerns were ignored,” said Adkins. “Now we need to go to court again. I’m confident that the court is going to set things right, but in the meantime, hundreds of wolves are going to die.”