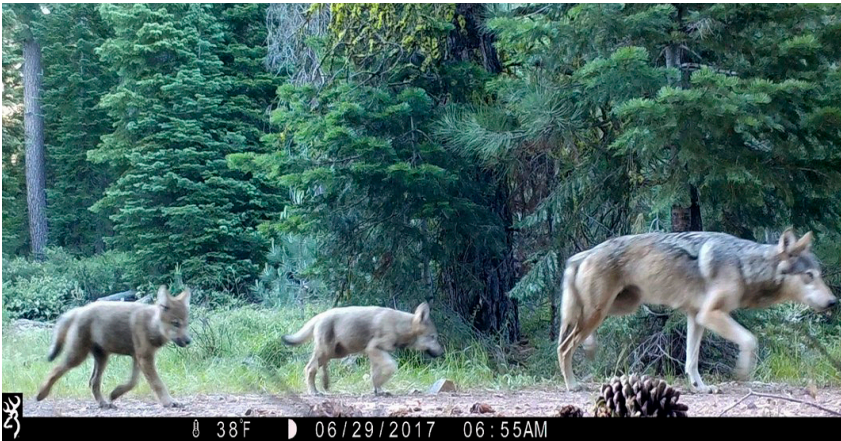


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Trump administration delists the gray wolf



U.S. Forest Service via AP, file photo) This June 29, 2017, file remote camera image provided by the U.S. Forest Service shows a female gray wolf and two of the three pups born in 2017 in the wilds of Lassen National Forest in Northern California. The Trump administration has announced it is lifting endangered species protections for gray wolves across most of the nation.

By Brian Maffly
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The gray wolf will no longer enjoy federal protection in a long-anticipated decision announced Thursday by Interior Secretary David Bernhardt just five days ahead of the presidential election.

In a move that is sure to be challenged in court, Bernhardt proclaimed gray wolves, once hunted out of existence in Utah and other Western states, “fully recovered” during a speech given at a Minnesota wildlife preserve, arguing the apex predator’s survival no longer requires protection under the Endangered Species Act.

“Today’s action reflects the Trump Administration’s continued commitment to species conservation based on the parameters of the law and the best scientific and commercial data available,” said Bernhardt while visiting the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. “After more than 45 years as a listed species, the gray wolf has exceeded all conservation goals for recovery. Today’s announcement simply reflects the determination that this species is neither a threatened nor endangered species based on the specific factors Congress has laid out in the law.”

Minnesota was the one lower state wolves still inhabited by the mid-20th century after decades of systematic efforts to rid the nation of the animal blamed for livestock deaths.

Today, about 6,000 wolves roam the United States, mostly in the northern tier of the nation from the Great Lakes to eastern Washington, according to the proposed delisting rule posted by the Fish and Wildlife Service in March 2019.

“This remarkable recovery success has been achieved as a result of more than 45 years of collaboration and partnerships with states, tribes, conservation organizations, private landowners, and other federal partners,” the Service announced at that time. “Many of our state and tribal partners in areas where the wolf is already delisted continue to demonstrate their ability to effectively manage their wolf populations.

Conservationists say the job of wolf recovery across its range is far from complete.

Vowing to sue to invalidate it, critics blasted the delisting decision as the tainted fruit of politics with insufficient grounding in science as required by the law.

“Again and again, the courts have rejected premature removal of wolf protection,” said Collette Adkins, carnivore conservation director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “But instead of pursuing further wolf recovery, the Fish and Wildlife Service has just adopted the broadest, most destructive delisting rule yet. The courts recognize, even if the feds don’t, that the Endangered Species Act requires real wolf recovery, including in the southern Rockies and other places with ideal wolf habitat.”

The gray wolf had previously been delisted in the Northern Rockies by an act of Congress, which recognized the successful reintroduction of wolves in the Yellowstone region that began in the mid-1990s. Wolf packs have long been reestablished in Montana, the Idaho Panhandle and northwest Wyoming, and individual wolves have been spotted in Utah from time to time.

A hunter killed one in Beaver County after mistaking it for coyote, an animal that anyone can shoot at any time and anywhere in Utah.

Utah leaders have been pushing for wolves’ complete delisting for years, even steering \$5.1 million in taxpayer money to a private group to advocate the cause. Their goal, which has now been accomplished with Bernhardt’s announcement, was to bring wolves under state management under a plan that would allow for just two breeding pairs in the Beehive State.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency within the Interior Department, first proposed delisting in 2018, barely a year after President Donald Trump was sworn in. A final rule should have been announced by March, but the administration appears to have waited until the heat of Trump’s reelection battle to unveil it for maximum political benefit, critics charge.

Next week, Colorado voters will go to the polls to decide whether wolves will be reintroduced in the western portion of that state in a project that could speed wolves’ arrival in the Beehive State.