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Lone Wolf OR-93 Travels Farther South in CA Than any Wolf Since the 1920s: He's Just East of Yosemite

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EnviroNews California) — He’s a lone wolf — literally *canis lupus*. He travels fast and far, to the south, and he travels in search of a mate. But will he find what’s he’s looking for, in a vast terrain of Northern California wilderness where gray wolves were annihilated through a nationwide, government-funded extermination program in the 1920s? His name is OR-93, and he’s a trailblazer, an explorer, boldly seeking out the canine companion of his dreams.

Outfitted with a tracking collar, the two-year-old male left the White River pack in Oregon just south of Mt. Hood. He arrived in California’s Modoc County in late January. And on Feb. 25, OR-93 reached Mono County, CA, east of Yosemite National Park in the central Sierra Nevada mountains — some 400 miles from the CA-OR border. It is the farthest south any wolf has travelled in the Golden State since their annihilation in the early 1900s – at least that researchers know about. So, if he’s searching for a mate, he may be barking up the wrong tree.

“We don’t know if there are other wolves nearby for him to find, but because of how far he is traveling this suggests there aren’t any nearby or very few,” the Center for Biological Diversity’s Senior West Coast Wolf Advocate Amaroq Weiss said in an email to *EnviroNews*. “We only know for sure where wolves are in California if an animal is radio-collared and if the radio-collar is working.”

Wolves without tracking collars may be seen on wildlife cameras or detected by the presence of footprints or scat. The number of known wolves in California is eight as of Feb. 2021: a pair in Siskiyou County, the Lassen Pack — the state’s only wolf pack which harbors five individuals that travel between Lassen and Plumas Counties — and OR-93, the lone wolf.

As part of the Trump Administration’s late-term policies in what *EnviroNews* deemed a “war on wildlife,” gray wolves were stripped of their federal protections under the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA). October 29, 2020, *canis lupus* was delisted by the Department of the Interior’s (DOI) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in what wildlife advocates called a “last-ditch ploy for Mid-west votes.” However, it wasn’t until Jan. 4, 2021 that the policy went into effect. Because OR-93 has crossed the state line, he will still receive some government protection.



Amaroq Weiss

“Any wolf that comes into California is fully protected under the *California Endangered Species Act*,” Weiss continued to *EnviroNews*. “The state protections in California mean it is illegal to kill this or any other wolf, and doing so is subject to jailtime and financial penalties.”

On Jan. 15, 2021, a coalition of 17 environmental groups sued on behalf of the wolf to overturn the Trump Administration’s rule-change. By turning the management of wolves over to states, conservationists believe the species’ recovery is in jeopardy — especially since it requires wolves from one state to repopulate a neighboring state where there are few or no wolves.

According to Weiss:

The fact that we have wolves dispersing into California is due to the fact there are wolves in Oregon to disperse here. But Oregon, like California, lost federal protections for its wolves in January, and wolves in Oregon are no longer protected under that state’s [own] endangered species act. So, even though California’s wolves are protected by our state endangered species act, the loss of federal protections for wolves here and elsewhere may slow down the trajectory of wolf recovery in California.

The protections afforded wolves under state and earlier federal regulations haven’t necessarily done what they were created to do. In 2015, an all-black pack of wolves was documented in Siskiyou County. The pack was implicated in the killing of cattle and disappeared several months later. In Dec. 2018, OR-59 was shot and killed in Modoc County. The wolf’s death is still under criminal investigation. In 2020, OR-54 was found dead in Shasta County; the case is also under investigation.



Wolf OR-59 Shot Dead in Modoc County

California's wolves were wiped out of existence in the 1920's after the implementation of a nationwide, government-sponsored eradication program. In the 2000s, wolves returned to Oregon and Idaho. In 2011, OR-7 became the first documented wolf to return to California crossing the state border from Oregon, from where a majority of the wolves in California have since originated.

With ranchers and trigger-happy yokels, as Pat Benatar would say, love is indeed "a battlefield." The path remains treacherous for OR-93, but with luck and the protection of California law, environmentalists can hope this will be the male who safely avoids the deadly pitfalls of being a wolf, finds his mate, and begins a new population in the once wolf-rich state of California.