



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)'s 2006 annual wolf program report is available, summarizing successful efforts to implement the approved state plan to the extent allowed by federal regulations. FWP leads wolf monitoring, directs conflict management, coordinates and authorizes research, and leads outreach efforts. FWP works closely with tribes, a variety of other state and federal agencies, interested organizations and individuals to continue the transition to managing wolves like other wildlife. For now, wolves are still listed.

Montana's wolf conservation and management plan is based on the work of the wolf advisory council, a diverse working group. Its balanced approach ensures the long-term success of wolf recovery in a landscape where people live, work, and recreate. The plan:

- recognizes wolves as a native species and part of Montana's wildlife heritage,
- allows wolves to find their place on the landscape similar to other wildlife, and
- addresses and resolve conflicts.

2006 Highlights

Wolf Numbers

- The population is secure but dynamic. Wolves share a landscape with people. Like other wildlife species, Montana's wolf population is subject to checks and balances, including strong reproduction in some areas, disease, vehicle strikes, and mortality due to conflicts with people.
- Hundreds of public and agency wolf reports and increased agency effort resulted in the most reliable minimum estimate ever. The Montana population increased about 19% 2005 to 2006. This was due to: (1) an actual increase in wolf numbers; (2) increased effort using with volunteers who contributed over 3000 hours and 2 seasonal employees leading to confirmation of suspected packs; (3) participation by Montanans and other tribal and agency partners who submitted wolf reports.
- As of December 31, 2006, the minimum Montana wolf population estimate was 316 wolves in 60 verified packs, 21 of which met the breeding pair criteria.
 - northwest Montana endangered area: 167 wolves in 31 verified packs, 11 breeding pairs.
 - southern Montana experimental area: 149 wolves in 29 packs, 10 breeding pairs.
- The majority of the increase was in the endangered area in northwest Montana. The number of wolves in Montana portion of the central Idaho and Greater Yellowstone federal recovery areas only increased slightly from 2005 to 2006. Several new packs formed by wolves that had dispersed from other Montana packs. Six dispersal events were documented in northwest Montana alone.
- Sixty-five wolf mortalities were documented in 2006, 53 (82%) of which were livestock related. The remaining mortalities were: 4 illegal, 2 vehicle strikes, 1 train strike, 1 euthanized for poor health, 1 natural mortality, 1 unknown, 1 legal harvest in Canada, and 1 died from handling complications after an incidental capture.

Distribution

- Statewide, wolf distribution remained about the same. New 2006 packs established primarily in northwest and far western Montana. But wolves are great travelers and could show up anywhere in Montana.
- About half of Montana's wolves and wolf packs live in the northwest Montana endangered area. The other half of the statewide population is equally split between the greater Yellowstone area and far western Montana from the Big Hole valley north and west to the lower Clark Fork.

Outreach Activities

- Increasing public awareness of wolves, wolf management, the federal regulations, and the state's plan is a top priority for FWP. FWP works with local communities to incorporate wolves into the landscape and to strike the balance between wolves and people.
- Outreach efforts take many forms, including one-on-one conversations, media interviews, printed materials, documentary films, FWP Outdoor Reports and press releases, and formal presentations to a wide variety of school, civic, and special interest groups.
- FWP wolf staff gave a minimum of 47 formal presentations to about 2000 people in 2006, but literally spoke to thousands more about wolf ecology, wolf-livestock interactions, wolf-big game interactions, human safety, Montana's wolf plan, federal delisting efforts, etc. Other FWP staff, USDA Wildlife Services personnel, and our tribal wildlife partners also provided information and did public outreach.
- FWP's wolf management web pages are periodically updated with new information and flight reports. The public can also report wolf activity online. See: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

Wolf-Livestock Interactions

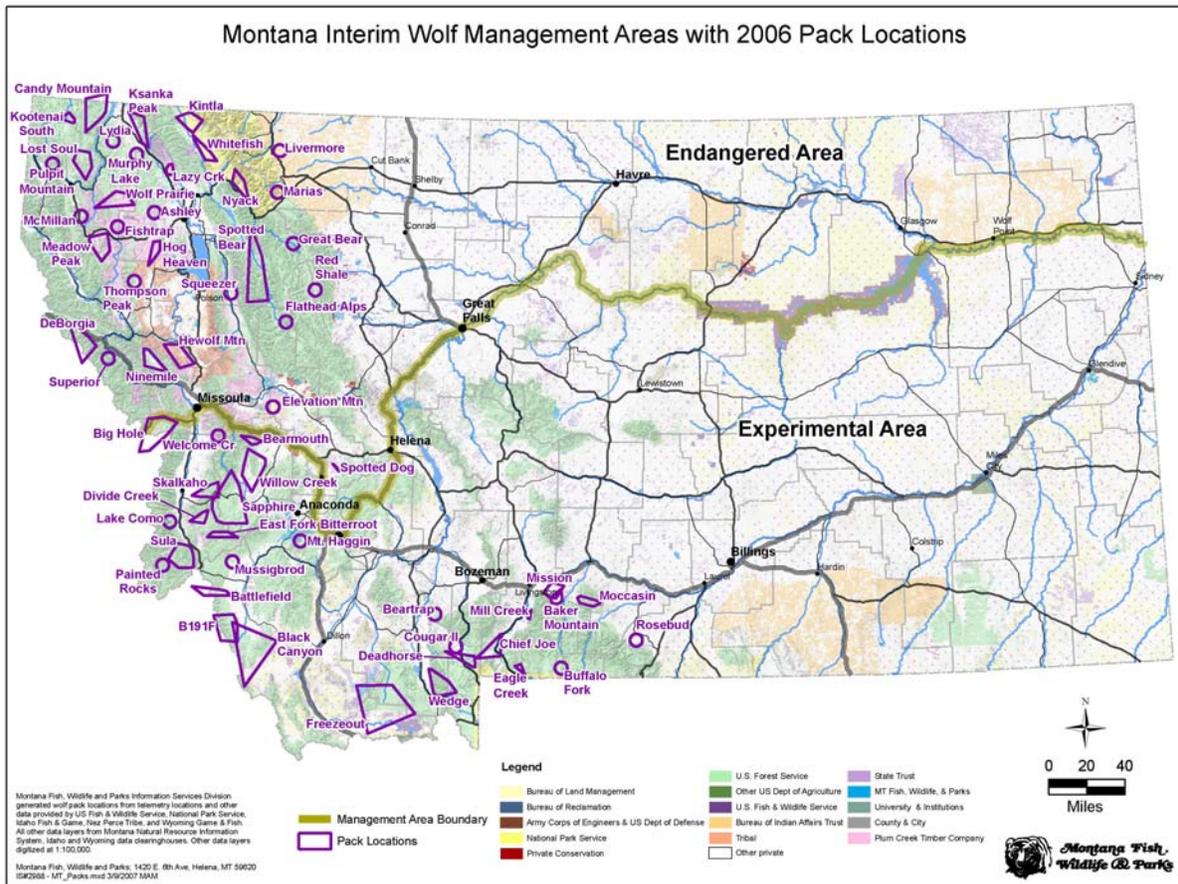
- Montana wolves routinely encounter livestock, though preying on them seems to be a "learned" behavior. Wolf depredation on livestock is difficult to predict in space and time. Nonetheless, FWP and USDA Wildlife Services (WS) work with livestock producers to decrease risk of loss to the extent possible.
- FWP and WS work together to address conflicts using a combination of non-lethal and lethal tools. Federal regulations and the state plan guide FWP's decision-making. Conflicts are addressed on a case-by-case, incremental basis, striving to connect the agency response to the damage in space and time. This is similar to the approach taken when other wildlife species damage private property in Montana.
- A citizens working group finalized details of a Montana-based wolf reimbursement program. Action is pending in the 2007 Montana Legislature. Its goals are to decrease risk of livestock loss through proactive tools and population management and to reimburse losses. Funding is still needed.
- Confirmed cattle death losses increased from 23 in 2005 to 32 in 2006, but confirmed sheep death losses decreased from 33 to 4. Two llamas and 4 dogs were also confirmed killed. Additional losses and injuries occurred, but either could not be verified or were determined "probable."
- A total of 53 wolves were killed to prevent further depredations, 4 of which were killed by private citizens in the Montana experimental area. Non-lethal tools were also used proactively and were helpful.
- Genetic testing revealed that a domestic wolf was responsible for a series of sheep depredations in eastern Montana.

Funding and Delisting

- With Montanans' support, FWP took on the added responsibility of wolf conservation and management in 2005, contingent on federal funding. In federal fiscal year 2005 and 2006, Montana got about \$620,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Congress. Montana is focused on securing adequate funding from federal and private sources for the long term.
- Montana and Idaho insisted on delisting in states with approved plans given that wolves are biologically recovered. In February 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a proposal to delist a proposed western distinct population segment of northern Rockies wolves, either with or without an approved plan from Wyoming. If a Wyoming plan is not approved, wolves in northwest Wyoming would remain listed. A final decision is expected by 2008.

See: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf

- to read and download the full report
- to report wolves and wolf sign
- to learn more about wolves, federal regulations, and the state program



Who do I contact?

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To Report a Dead Wolf or Possible Illegal Activity:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Missoula, Montana: (406) 329-3000
Bozeman, Montana: (406) 582-0336
Casper, Wyoming: (307) 261-6365

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
1-800-TIP-MONT
Nearest FWP Regional Office