EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ............................................................................................................. i

TABLE OF CONTENTS ................................................................................................................ xxix

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................... xxxiii

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................ xxvii

CHAPTER 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY .............................................................. 1
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action .................................................................................. 1
Benefits of the Proposed Action ..................................................................................................... 2
Decisions to be Made ......................................................................................................................... 2
Other Agencies that have Jurisdiction or Responsibility ......................................................... 2
Public Involvement Process .......................................................................................................... 3
Issues Identified through Public Involvement and Evaluated in the Draft and Final EIS .......... 6
Issues not Evaluated in the Final EIS ............................................................................................ 11
FWP’s Recommendation, Summary of Major Conclusions, 
and Supporting Information. ...................................................................................................... 13
FWP’s Recommendation ............................................................................................................ 13
Summary of Major Conclusions and Supporting Information from the Draft EIS ................. 14
New Information Obtained since Circulation of the Draft EIS ............................................... 14

CHAPTER 2: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT ............................................................................. 17
A Review of the Gray Wolf in Montana .......................................................................................... 17
History ............................................................................................................................................. 17
Current Population Status and Distribution ................................................................................ 17
Ecology ........................................................................................................................................... 19
Social and Cultural Values ........................................................................................................... 26
Legal Status and Classification under Montana Statutes ........................................................... 26
FWP Administration .................................................................................................................... 27
FWP Funding ................................................................................................................................ 28
Wildlife Resources ........................................................................................................................ 29
Categories of Wildlife Defined in Montana Statutes .................................................................. 29
Wolf-Prey Relationships .............................................................................................................. 30
Wildlife Habitat ............................................................................................................................. 34
Plant Species of Special Concern ............................................................................................... 34
Noxious Weeds ............................................................................................................................. 35
Land Management ....................................................................................................................... 35
Travel/Access Management ......................................................................................................... 35
Connectivity ................................................................................................................................. 35
Wolf Den and Rendezvous Sites ................................................................................................. 36
Economics / Livelihoods .............................................................................................................. 36
Livestock Depredation ................................................................................................................ 36
Big Game Hunting ....................................................................................................................... 41
Outfitted Hunting ........................................................................................................................ 49
Regional Economics ................................................................................................................... 51
Recreational and Social Values ................................................................................................. 54
FWP Fiscal Environment ............................................................................................................ 58
Human Safety ............................................................................................................................... 59
Wolf-Human Encounters ............................................................................................................ 60
CHAPTER 3: ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PREFERRED .................................................. 67
Introduction................................................................................................................... ........ 67
Alternatives Selected for Analysis.................................................................................. 68
Alternatives Identified during Scoping but not Considered in the EIS............................... 69
Description of the Alternatives Considered.................................................................... 70
Alternative 1. No Action.................................................................................................... 70
Implementation of this Alternative.................................................................................. 70
How Does this Address the Major Issues?........................................................................ 70
Alternative 2. Updated Council, FWP Preferred.......................................................... 74
Implementation of this Alternative.................................................................................. 74
How Does this Address the Major Issues?........................................................................ 74
Alternative 3. Additional Wolf........................................................................................ 95
Implementation of this Alternative.................................................................................. 95
How does this Address the Major Issues?.......................................................................... 95
Alternative 4. Minimum Wolf........................................................................................ 97
Implementation of this Alternative.................................................................................. 98
How Does this Address the Major Issues?........................................................................ 98
Alternative 5. Contingency.............................................................................................. 103
Implementation of this Alternative.................................................................................. 103
How does this address the major issues?......................................................................... 104

CHAPTER 4: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES .................................................................. 115
Introduction................................................................................................................... ........ 115
Methods Used to Estimate Some of the Environmental Consequences......................... 115
Wolf Numbers and Distribution....................................................................................... 115
Prey Populations and Hunter Opportunity...................................................................... 116
Economics....................................................................................................................... 117
Alternative 1. No Action.................................................................................................... 119
Biological Environment................................................................................................. 120
Human Environment....................................................................................................... 121
Economics/Livelihoods.................................................................................................... 122
FWP Fiscal Impacts......................................................................................................... 128
Administration, Funding, and Legal Status....................................................................... 128
Physical Environment..................................................................................................... 130
Short Term, Long Term, and Cumulative Effects............................................................. 130
Mitigation......................................................................................................................... 130
Irretrievable Commitments............................................................................................... 131
Alternative 2. Updated Council, FWP Preferred.......................................................... 131
Biological Environment................................................................................................. 131
Human Environment....................................................................................................... 134
Economics/Livelihoods.................................................................................................... 135
FWP Fiscal Impacts......................................................................................................... 137
APPENDIX 2. Species of Concern in Montana. ................................................................. 281

APPENDIX 3. Noxious Weeds of Montana. ................................................................. 287

APPENDIX 4. Sources of Written and Oral Comments on the Draft EIS, March/April/May 2003. ................................................................. 289

APPENDIX 5. FWP Responses to Public Comments and Representative Comments on the Draft EIS. ................................................................. 309

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The main issues identified through two public comment opportunities (scoping in 2002 and the Draft EIS in 2003) and their frequency. .............................................................. 10

Table 2. Six major ecosystems of Montana based on topography, climate and vegetation. ............... 34

Table 3. Cattle and calf inventory, value per head, and death losses in Montana from all causes 1990-1999 (Montana Agricultural Statistics: October 1999, p. 146, information on January 1.). ........................................................................................................... 37

Table 4. Annual predator losses (all species combined) and non-predator losses of sheep and lambs (number of head) in Montana, 1990-1998, (Montana Agricultural Statistics: October 1999, pp. 150-51). ........................................................................................................... 37

Table 5. Summary of the number of wolf-related complaints received and investigated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services Wolf Depredation Control Program in Montana 1997-2002, according to federal fiscal years (October 1 – September 30). ................................................................. 39

Table 6. Probable wolf-caused losses that were unconfirmed by Wildlife Services during federal fiscal years 1999-2001 (WS unpubl. data). ................................................................. 41


Table 8. Average number of moose permits available in Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regions 1-5 for 1995-2001. ........................................................................................................... 44


Table 10. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 3 elk hunting information, 1990-2001............. 50
Table 11. Outfitter-reported total number of clients served on hunts for all big game species in northwestern Montana (Flathead and Lincoln counties) and southwest Montana (Gallatin, Beaverhead, Sweet Grass, and Madison counties), 1995-2001. The totals include big game hunting clients served per year for both those clients buying licenses through the outfitter-sponsored license quota and those buying licenses on their own (non-sponsored). .................................................................51

Table 12. State of Montana, Output, Employment and Income: 1999. Industry output is reported in millions of 1999 dollars. ..................................................................................................................53

Table 13. Summary of expenditures associated with hunting in Montana by all U.S. Residents, 1996. .................................................................................................................................54

Table 14. Comparison of net economic value (NEV) per day estimates for Montana deer and elk hunting trips (in current 2002 dollars). .................................................................55

Table 15. Wildlife species visitors to the Greater Yellowstone Area would most like to see, in order of preference. Preference is measured as the percentage of respondents who cited a species as one of the top three species they would most like to see on their trip. ..................................................................................................................55

Table 16. Percent of respondents who reported whether the possibility of seeing wolves affected their decision to visit the GYA. ................................................................................................56

Table 17. Comparison of responses by Montana residents to statements concerning wildlife and wildlife habitat when asked during winter or summer visits to Yellowstone National Park. ................................................................................................................57

Table 18. Greater Yellowstone Area residents’ attitudes toward issues surrounding wolf reintroduction. ..................................................................................................................58

Table 19. Trends in Montana deer and elk license sales and prices, 1980-2000. ...............................................59

Table 20. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 2000 revenue from major deer and elk license and permits. ..........................................................................................................................60

Table 21. Issues raised by the public during the scoping period (in the order of their frequency), whether the issue drove creation of a separate alternative, and whether the issue is treated differently in each alternative. ........................................................................67

Table 22. The spectrum of management activities to manage and conserve wolves in Montana. The adaptive management model calls for selection of different management strategies as the number of breeding pairs (according to the federal recovery definition) changes from 10-15 to greater than 15. The model also calls for different strategies, depending on landownership patterns (Public Lands and Mixed Land Ownerships), social factors, land use patterns, biological constraints, and the physical attributes of the environment. ..................................................................................75

xxxiii
Table 23. The spectrum of management activities to maintain viable populations of prey species. The adaptive management model calls for selection of different management strategies as the number of breeding pairs (according to the federal recovery definition) changes from 10-15 to greater than 15. The model also calls for different strategies, depending on landownership patterns (Public Lands and Mixed Land Ownerships), social factors, land use patterns, biological constraints, and the physical attributes of the environment. ......................................................... 83

Table 24. The spectrum of potential management activities to minimize the potential for wolf-livestock conflicts and the management activities to resolve conflicts where and when they develop. The adaptive management model calls for selection of different management strategies as the number of breeding pairs (according to the federal recovery definition) changes from 10-15 to greater than 15. The model also calls for different strategies, depending on landownership patterns (Public Lands and Mixed Land Ownerships), social factors, land use patterns, biological constraints, and the physical attributes of the environment. .......................................................... 86

Table 25. Direction and guidelines for compensation of livestock losses due to wolf depredation in Montana. The adaptive management model calls for selection of different management strategies as the number of breeding pairs (according to the federal recovery definition) changes from 10-15 to greater than 15. The model also calls for different strategies, depending on landownership patterns (Public Lands and Mixed Land Ownerships), social factors, land use patterns, biological constraints, and the physical attributes of the environment. ......................................................... 89

Table 26. Spectrum of management and public outreach activities to ensure public safety in Montana. The adaptive management model calls for selection of different management strategies as the number of breeding pairs (according to the federal recovery definition) from 10-15 to greater than 15. The model also calls for different strategies, depending on landownership patterns (Public Lands and Mixed Land Ownerships), social factors, land use patterns, biological constraints, and the physical attributes of the environment. ......................................................... 93

Table 27. Wolf management strategies to maintain the minimum number of wolves required in Montana under Alternative 4 (Minimum Wolf). ......................................................... 99

Table 28. Potential management activities that address wolf-livestock conflicts under Alternative 4 (Minimum Wolf). Management actions and the number of special kill permits become more liberal with increasing numbers of wolf packs. ..................... 102

Table 29. The spectrum of potential management activities to minimize the potential for wolf-livestock conflicts and the management tools available to resolve conflicts where and when they develop. The adaptive management model calls for a more conservative approach for public lands and when there are 10-15 breeding pairs (according to the federal recovery definition). More liberal tools become available if there are more than 15 breeding pairs. ......................................................... 106
Table 30. Summary of how each alternative addresses the issues identified by the Montana Wolf Management Advisory Council and by the general public. ................................. 109

Table 31. Estimated livestock losses (confirmed and probable) and the economic value of livestock and domestic animal losses in the year 2015 for Alternative 1 (No Action). ........................................................................................................................ 124

Table 32. Range of potential change in the number of hunters, hunter days, and opportunity for deer, elk, and moose between 2003 and 2015 based on the historic range of variation. .............................................................................................................. 125

Table 33. Number of licenses sold to nonresidents (NR) for a variety of deer and elk hunting opportunities, 1990-2000. .............................................................................................................. 126

Table 34. Expected variation in FWP revenue from the changes expected in statewide license sales of antlerless elk permits, Deer B licenses, and moose permits in 2015 based on 2002 prices. .............................................................................................................. 129

Table 35. Estimated livestock losses (confirmed and probable) and the economic value of livestock and domestic animal losses in the year 2015 for Alternative 2 (Updated Council). .............................................................................................................. 136

Table 36. Implementation budget for Alternative 2 (Updated Council). .............................................................................................................. 138

Table 37. Estimated livestock losses (confirmed and probable) and the economic value of livestock and domestic animal losses in the year 2015 for Alternative 3 (Additional Wolf). .............................................................................................................. 142

Table 38. Implementation budget for Alternative 3 (Additional Wolf). .............................................................................................................. 144

Table 39. Estimated livestock losses (confirmed and probable) and the economic value of livestock and domestic animal losses in the year 2015 for Alternative 4 (Minimum Wolf). .............................................................................................................. 148

Table 40. Implementation budget for Alternative 4 (Minimum Wolf). .............................................................................................................. 150

Table 41. Estimated livestock losses (confirmed and probable) and the economic value of livestock and domestic animal losses in the year 2015 for Alternative 5 (Contingency). .............................................................................................................. 154

Table 42. Implementation budget for Alternative 5 (Contingency). .............................................................................................................. 155

Table 43. Summary of environmental consequences for each alternative. .............................................................................................................. 157

xxxv
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Wolf pack distribution in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, federal recovery area boundaries, and state boundaries (shown in bold). Large symbols represent established packs. Small symbols indicate newly formed packs or packs whose status is unknown at the present time. .............................................................. 18

Figure 2. Grey wolf population trends in the Northwestern Montana, Greater Yellowstone, and Central Idaho recovery areas from 1979-2002. ................................................................. 19

Figure 3. Wolf pack distribution and land ownership patterns in Montana. Approximate wolf pack territories are designated by the polygons with horizontal lines. Gray tones represent public lands and white indicates private lands. ....................................... 20

Figure 4. Minimum fall number of wolves in the State of Montana, 1979-2001, and the first known dispersal event leading to a new pack in the Montana population (USFWS unpubl. data). The arrows show the years of the first known dispersals of radio-collared animals into the State of Montana to start a new pack or join an existing pack. ........................................................................................... 21

Figure 5. Total number of elk hunters and total elk harvest in Montana, 1954-2001. ....................... 32

Figure 6. Total bull elk and antlerless elk harvest in Montana, 1960-2001. ........................................ 32

Figure 7. Total deer harvest for white-tailed deer and mule deer combined 1960-2001 and total number of deer hunters in Montana, 1985-2001. .................................................. 33

Figure 8. Total buck and total antlerless harvest for white-tailed deer and mule deer combined in Montana, 1960-2001. ..................................................................................... 33

Figure 9. Number of cattle depredations confirmed by Wildlife Services as wolf-caused in Montana, 1980-2001. ................................................................................................. 39

Figure 10. Number of sheep depredations confirmed by Wildlife Services as wolf-caused in Montana, 1980-2001. ................................................................................................. 40

Figure 11. Number of domestic dogs and llama depredations confirmed by Wildlife Services as wolf-caused in Montana, 1980-2001. .............................................................. 40

Figure 12. Total number of elk hunters, elk hunter days, and number of antlerless permits available in Montana, 1975-2001. .............................................................. 43

Figure 13. Total number of deer hunters and total hunter days for white-tailed deer and mule deer combined in Montana, 1987-2001. .............................................................. 43

Figure 14. Total number of moose permits available, hunter harvest, and moose hunter success in Montana, 1990-2001. .............................................................. 44

Figure 15. Average number of elk hunters for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regions 1-5 for two time periods 1990-1994 and 1995-2001. .............................................................. 45

xxxvi
Figure 16. Average number of elk hunter days for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regions 1-5 for two time periods 1990-1994 and 1995-2001. ......................................................... 45

Figure 17. Average number of deer hunters for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regions 1-5 for two time periods 1990-1994 and 1995-2001. ................................................................. 46

Figure 18. Average number of deer hunter days for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regions 1-5 for two time periods 1990-1994 and 1995-2001. ........................................... 46

Figure 19. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 1 white-tailed deer harvest and number of deer hunters, 1960-2000. ................................................................................... 47

Figure 20. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 1 elk harvest and number of elk hunters 1970-2000. Hunter opportunity for bull elk was reduced through adoption of the more restrictive brow-tined bull regulation in 1997-98 from the previous antlered bull regulation. ................................................................. 47