

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—AUGUST 12, 2010 Contact Ron Aasheim, (406) 444-4038; or visit FWP's website at fwp.mt.gov

FWP PRESSES FOR ACTION ON WOLF MANAGEMENT

Following the recent district court ruling that returned the region's wolves to the endangered species list, state wildlife officials continue to press federal authorities to provide management options that would bring the wolf population in balance with other wildlife and the people who live and work in Montana.

"As a result of the recent federal court decision, we are left with no way to actively manage wolves as a Montana wildlife species," said Joe Maurier, director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. "The wolf is recovered. More than 500 wolves live in Montana. Wolves are not the enemy, and there is a place in Montana for them, but wolves have to be managed just like other wildlife. Right now we can't do that."

Montana hoped to reduce the state's wolf populations to about 450 wolves this year by using a combination of management tools, including hunting.

FWP joined in a federal lawsuit in defense of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2009 decision to delist wolves in Montana and Idaho, but not in Wyoming. However, US District Judge Donald Molloy in Missoula reinstated federal protections on Aug. 5. That ruling essentially scuttled Montana's efforts to maintain authority to manage a viable and connected wolf population yet still reduce wolf impacts on big game populations and livestock producers.

Maurier said Montana's best option now is to appeal the district court decision to the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit while continuing attempts to reach a settlement with the 13 plaintiffs—Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Humane Society of the United States, Center for Biological Diversity, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Friends of the Clearwater, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands, Western Watershed Project, Wildlands Network and Hells Canyon Preservation Council.

"The absence of any true ability to manage wolves means that Montana's wolf population will continue to grow and impacts to livestock growers and to Montana's wildlife herds will grow more severe," Maurier said. "It's disappointing, when FWP and the people of Montana have

worked so hard and done everything we were asked to do, to see a legal technicality upend the intent of the Endangered Species Act, which is to recover a species."

The court ruled that because Wyoming still doesn't have adequate regulatory mechanisms to manage wolves, the USFWS broke the law by delisting the wolf in Montana and Idaho, which each have federally approved wolf management plans.

Maurier said FWP worked to hammer out a solution even while the lawsuit wound its way through the federal court system. "We've been working for months trying to bring everyone to the table and will continue those efforts. If we can't reach a settlement, FWP will press for authority under the federal Endangered Species Act to enable Montana to 'take' wolves."

As a contingency to Montana's 2010 hunting season, FWP's Chief Legal Counsel Bob Lane said FWP will continue to work with the USFWS to clarify the process and potential associated with a number of options under federal endangered species provisions that could:

- allow for a conservation hunting season;
- provide authority to remove wolves in some areas where they are impacting other wildlife populations;
- provide for a more aggressive response to livestock depredations, to include full pack removals.

"We also know Montana's senior US Senator Max Baucus is considering legislation that would give Montana the authority to manage wolves," Maurier said. "Our folks in Washington understand the sacrifices the people of Montana have made over the past 15 years to recover the wolf."

Due to the decision, the line that once divided Montana's wolf population as a "nonessential experimental" population in the southern half of the state, and an "endangered" population to the north, has also been reinstated by the federal court.

Under these regulations, in the northern half of Montana wolves are a federally protected endangered species.

• Northern Montana's Endangered Wolf Population

- Endangered wolves cannot be hazed, harassed, or killed by livestock owners or other private citizens.
- Endangered wolves can only be killed in self-defense or to defend the life of another person.
- o Hunting and trapping is prohibited.

In the southern half of Montana, wolves are federally classified as a "nonessential-experimental" population.

• Southern Montana's Nonessential-Experimental Wolf Population

- Nonessential-experimental wolves can be hazed or harassed, but not killed, when too close to livestock.
- Nonessential-experimental wolves can be killed by livestock owners if wolves are seen actively chasing, or attacking livestock or domestic dogs on either public or private land. The incident must be reported to FWP within 24 hours.
- Nonessential-experimental wolves can be killed in self-defense or to defend the life of another person.
- Hunting and trapping is prohibited.

While state and federal officials can employ limited lethal and nonlethal controls of problem wolves in each area, FWP Director Maurier expressed disappointment with the recovered population's renewed federal protections. "You can't manage anything successfully or sustainably under such circumstances," he said.

Maurier said FWP will additionally seek to: (1) immediately remove the dual classification status of wolves in Montana by requesting that the USFWS down list northern Montana's endangered wolf population to threatened; and (2) push for a resolution to the current impasse, including discussions with Wyoming, which would support a delisting proposal and restore state management authority.

The recovery of the wolf in the northern Rockies is one of the most successful and rapid endangered species comebacks on record. In the mid-1990s, to hasten the overall pace of wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies, more than 60 wolves were released into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho.

The minimum recovery goal for wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains was set at a minimum of 30 breeding pairs—successfully reproducing wolf packs—and a minimum of 300 individual wolves for at least three consecutive years. This goal was achieved in 2002, and the wolf population has increased every year since.

The wolf population in the Northern Rocky Mountain Recovery Area, which comprises parts of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, was estimated to be at least 1,706, with 242 packs, and 115 breeding pairs at the end of last year. About 525 wolves were estimated to inhabit Montana, in 100 packs and 34 breeding pairs.

To learn more about Montana's wolf population, visit FWP online at fwp.mt.gov, Click Montana Wolves,