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STATE WILDLIFE OFFICIALS HAIL CONGRESSIONAL WOLF ACTION

Montana wildlife officials heaped praise on U.S. Senator Sen. Jon Tester today as a Congressional measure he helped craft removed gray wolves from the list of threatened and endangered species in Montana, Idaho, and parts Oregon, Washington and Utah

"Finally," Joe Maurier, director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks said when he learned that the brief 104-word measure passed into federal law along with the budget bill that will fund the federal government through September. "Our thanks go out to Sen. Tester for providing FWP with the authority to once again manage wolves under Montana's highly regarded wolf conservation and management plan."

Wolf management in Montana will once again become the full responsibility of the state when the new rule is published in the Federal Register, which must occur within 60 days. The new law also excludes the Congressional delisting action from judicial review, which scuttled delisting in 2009 and 2010.

Governor Brian Schweitzer, too, said he welcomed the delisting of the wolf through the budget resolution.

"Enough is enough ó Montana must have the ability to manage wildlife, to do our job, to seek a balance among predator and prey," Schweitzer said. "We need the authority to respond to the challenges wolves present every day. This is a common sense measure that will ensure good management of wolves through Montana's existing plan, which allows for healthy numbers of wolves and safeguards the interests of ranchers and sportsmen."

Maurier said FWP will begin to prepare a hunting season proposal for the FWP Commission to consider.

"Wildlife management is about seeking a balance, in this case a balance between wolves, other wildlife, livestock producers and other interests" Maurier said. "Montana played a pivotal role in the recovery of the Rocky Mountain gray wolf and the expectation is that Montana will play an important role its future. FWP is prepared and ready to meet that challenge. We are committed to the responsible conservation and management of the wolf to ensure that the population remains vital and recovered in Montana."

With delisting Montana wolves will be reclassified under state law as a species in need of management. The new classification offers wolves legal protection much like other managed

ability to protect livestock and domestic dogs. Similar to
ly biting, wounding, chasing, harassing, or attacking
livestock or domestic dogs could be killed. Such incidents must be reported to FWP in 72 hours.

The recovery of the wolf in the northern Rockies remains one of the fastest endangered species comebacks on record. In the mid 1990s, to hasten the overall pace of wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies, 66 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^ô successfully reproducing wolf packs^ô and a minimum of 300 individual wolves for at least three consecutive years and well distributed throughout the recovery area. The goal was achieved in 2002, and the wolf population has increased every year since.

The northern Rockies "metapopulation" is comprised of wolf populations in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. About 1,650 wolves, in 244 packs and 111 breeding pairs live in the region, where wolves can travel about freely to join existing packs or form new packs. This, combined with wolf populations in Canada and Alaska, assures genetic diversity.

At least 566 wolves inhabited Montana at the end of 2010, in at least 108 packs and 39 breeding pairs, Maurier said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had announced decisions to delist the wolf twice since 2008, with each decision successfully challenged in federal court which jettisoned the wolf back on to the federal list of endangered species.

FWP has led wolf management under the federal guidelines since 2004. Delisting allows Montana to manage wolves in a manner similar to how bears, mountain lions and other wildlife species are managed, guided by state management plans, administrative rules, and laws.

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