



PRESS BACKGROUND  
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Contact: Doug Heiken, 541.344.0675

### **Will Wolves Return to Oregon?**

*What Removing Gray Wolves From Endangered Species Protections Means For the Future of Wolves*

#### **Issue:**

If gray wolves lose their federal Endangered Species Act protections, **the chance of successful recovery** of a healthy Oregon wolf population will fall to **almost zero**.

#### **Recent de-listing decision:**


Under direction from the Bush administration, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has announced their decision to remove the Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf from the Endangered Species Act. This plan comes despite the fact that a federal court reversed an earlier Bush administration directed decision that would have downgraded the status of the gray wolf from endangered to threatened.

#### **Federal Wolf Facts:**

- 🐾 Gray wolves were one of the first species given protection under the ESA.
- 🐾 Current Northern Rocky Mountain wolf populations stand at 1,000-1,500. Scientists estimate that upwards of 2,500 to 5,000 are needed to support the long-term sustainability of the population.
- 🐾 Current minimum recovery goals of 300 wolves are far too little for sustained recovery. Ed Bangs, the head of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's wolf recovery project, admitted in *Science* magazine that he thinks 300 wolves are not enough.
- 🐾 Idaho, Montana and Wyoming have established state management policies that would allow wolves to be hunted and shot, reducing their numbers to just 150 per state.

#### **Oregon Wolf Facts:**

- 🐾 There have been five confirmed wolf sightings in Oregon since 1999.
- 🐾 Of those five, one was transported back to Idaho, one was struck and killed by a car and two were illegally shot and killed. The fifth wolf, spotted in January of 2008 is currently roaming the hills of Northeast Oregon.
- 🐾 The Oregon Wolf Recovery Plan calls for four breeding pairs in both Western and Eastern Oregon.
- 🐾 Wolves have not been manually reintroduced into Oregon. They are expected to migrate from Idaho. If Idaho wolves lose their protection under the ESA, there will be a greatly reduced chance that wolves will disperse into Oregon.

 With the federal de-listing, Oregon's Endangered Species Act would still protect wolves living in Oregon. However, with reduced populations in the rest of its range, there is little chance gray wolves will ever benefit from Oregon ESA protections.

### **Quotes:**

“The Endangered Species Act is the most effective protection wolves returning to Oregon have against poachers and others who would shoot them on sight. Unfortunately, the Bush administration appears to be gunning both for the wolves and the laws that protect them.” –Steve Pedery, Conservation Director, Oregon Wild.

“In Oregon, we are just seeing the very beginnings of returning wolf populations. By prematurely removing the gray wolf from the Endangered Species Act, we are short-circuiting any chance that wolves will return to their historic home in Oregon.” – Doug Heiken, Conservation and Restoration Coordinator, Oregon Wild.

### **History:**

Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) were once common in Oregon, occupying most of the state. However, a deliberate effort to eradicate the species was successful by the 1940s.

Trouble for the wolf began in 1843, sixteen years before Oregon became a state, when the first wolf bounty was established. In 1913, people capitalizing on wolf bounties could collect a State of Oregon bounty of \$5 and an Oregon State Game Commission bounty of \$20. The last record of a paid wolf bounty was in 1946.

After a 60 years absence, wolves are once again making a presence in Oregon, having dispersed into the state from nearby Idaho. One of the first sightings came in 1999 when a lone wolf was captured near the middle fork of the John Day River and returned to Idaho. In 2000, two wolves were found dead - one killed by a car, the other illegally shot.

In 2006, a flurry of sightings have led state wildlife biologists to believe that a number of wild wolves are likely living in Northeast Oregon near the Wallowa Mountains and the Eagle Cap Wilderness area. More recently, in May of 2007 a wolf was found shot to death near La Grande, OR.

The large tracts of pristine and unspoiled wilderness and roadless areas in Northeast Oregon are vital components to the success of wolves, and plenty of other animals, too. The re-appearance of wolves in Oregon further underscores the importance of protecting what little roadless areas remain on public land.