

## Feds announce details of settlement

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reached an agreement with the majority of plaintiffs, including Defenders of Wildlife, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and eight other conservation organizations, to settle ongoing litigation over a Federal District Court's 2010 decision to reinstate Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for gray wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains.

If approved by the court, the settlement offers a path for the Service to return management of the recovered wolf populations in Idaho and Montana to the States while the Service considers options for delisting gray wolves across the Rocky Mountain region, where population levels have returned to biologically recovered levels.

"For too long, management of wolves in this country has been caught up in controversy and litigation instead of rooted in science where it belongs. This proposed settlement provides a path forward to recognize the successful recovery of the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains and to return its management to States and Tribes," said Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes.

"I am pleased that the negotiations resulted in this important agreement," said Acting Service Director Rowan Gould. "The proposed settlement has the potential to return management of wolves in Montana and Idaho to the states and tribes and will also enable the Fish and Wildlife Service to use our limited resources to address other species in need of recovery actions."

Under the terms of the settlement, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed to address the delisting of wolves in the region in the future as a distinct population segment, rather than on a state-by-state basis. The parties are requesting that the court allow the 2009 delisting to be reinstated in Montana and Idaho on an interim basis, in accordance with approved state management plans, until a full delisting can be completed for the northern Rocky Mountain wolf population. The parties are agreeing that they allow these steps to move forward, up to and including a potential delisting of Rocky Mountain wolves, without resorting to further litigation.

"I want to recognize the great work of Deputy Secretary Hayes, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the entire negotiating team, and all those who worked with us to find a common-sense way forward," said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

Separate negotiations are ongoing between the Service and the State of Wyoming in an effort to reach agreement on a management plan for wolves in that state. If a mutually acceptable management plan for wolves in Wyoming can be developed, then the Service will be able to proceed with delisting proceedings addressing wolves throughout the northern Rocky Mountains.

The delisting provided for under this agreement does not extend to the small wolf populations in eastern Oregon and Washington, or to Utah, where there are not believed to be any resident wolves. FWS intends to address the longer term status of wolves in Oregon, Washington, and Utah when it issues a new rule addressing status of wolves across the Northern Rocky Mountain region. FWS will work with state officials in Oregon, Washington and Utah in the meantime to address any wolf management issues and retains the option to consider reclassifying wolves from "endangered" to "threatened" in those states in order to provide more management flexibility.

The Service and the plaintiffs have agreed to take other actions that will clarify implementation of the ESA and ensure that a recovered wolf population continues to be sustainably managed under approved state management plans. Additional terms of the proposed agreement are available [here](#).

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.