

“Protecting Wolves in the American West,” Natural Resources Defense Council Fact Sheet

Document Excerpt #1

It's a wildlife success story: After an absence of more than 50 years, wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in 1995 and 1996, and they now number roughly 1,300 individuals in the Northern Rockies. To many Americans, wolves represent wild nature that has been lost in many parts of the country. But these magnificent animals are once again at risk. The Bush Administration's proposal to remove Endangered Species Act protections—to “delist” wolves—threatens to return Northern Rocky Mountain wolves to the brink of extinction by allowing states to kill more than 60% of the current wolf population.

Wolf Delisting and the “Killing Rule”

The Bush Administration's proposal gives the states a free pass to kill hundreds of gray wolves, just when wolves are making good progress toward recovery. And another loophole would make it possible for states to kill wolves even while they are on the endangered species list: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has also proposed to revise section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act, known as the “killing rule,” which would allow the states to eliminate wolves if they are “a major cause” of numerical or distributional changes in elk herds. The fact that drought, shrinking habitat, other predators and human hunting have been found to be the primary causes of elk herd changes becomes irrelevant under this new rule. In effect, wolves can be exterminated for doing what they are supposed to do—maintain a healthy ecosystem by preying on elk.

The federal government has failed to apply sound science to protect wolf populations. For the past five years, the federal government has been aggressively killing wolves, without solving the underlying conflicts with livestock that are prompting the slaughter of numerous wolf packs. After delisting, even more wolves will be killed. Although independent biologists agree that 2,000 to 3,000 wolves are needed in

the Northern Rockies for a healthy, viable wolf population, the Bush Administration's plan could reduce the number of wolves to as low as just 100 in each state.

Why Wolves Matter

Wolves are essential to a healthy ecosystem. Within a few years of returning wolves to Yellowstone Park, researchers found wolves were changing ecosystem dynamics. Wolves reduced coyote populations, which helped small animals, birds, and rodents become more plentiful—a boon for predators like hawks and eagles. Elk soon became naturally vigilant and moved around more frequently, which helped aspen and willow trees grow where they had been over-browsed, in turn allowing the return of beavers and riparian bird species. Wolves play other valuable roles in the interconnected Western ecosystem.

- **Elk, deer and moose benefit from wolf predation.** Wolves and prey such as elk, deer and moose have existed together for thousands of years. Wolves tend to naturally select as prey the animals easiest for them to hunt—those that are injured, sick, old or very young. In removing these animals from herds, the remaining animals are younger, stronger, and faster, making the herd more robust and healthier overall.
- **Wolves help prevent the spread of disease in ungulates.** Biologists believe the presence of wolves will prevent chronic wasting disease from wiping out large numbers of deer, as it has in southern Rockies states such as Colorado. In the Great Lakes states, chronic wasting disease in white-tailed deer has only been located in areas where wolves are not present.
- **Wolves mediate the impact of climate change on scavenging animals such as bears, coyotes, eagles, fox and many others.** As winters become milder and shorter over time, elk and deer have an easier time surviving. Animals that rely on winter-killed carcasses have had less to eat

in recent springs. Wolves can reduce the negative impact of global warming because wolf-killed carcasses provide food for scavengers.

Wolves provide substantial economic benefits. A 2006 study in Yellowstone determined tourists visiting the park to view wolves have brought \$35 million annually to the region's economy, which turns over into more than \$70 million annually for northern Rockies communities. In the Great Lakes area, wolf-related tourism provides \$3 million to the small town of Ely, Minnesota alone.

We Can Do More to Protect Wolves

Officials at the state and federal level must do more to protect this valuable top-level predator.

Stop delisting and halt adoption of the revised 10(j) rule. Wyoming's plan to classify wolves as "predators" and open them up for public killing and Idaho's demand for zero wolves in the state illustrate how vulnerable wolves will be in the absence of federal protection. States must establish rational, scientifically based wolf management plans and programs that maintain wolf populations at appropriate numbers and ensure their long-term health.

Enhance habitat protection

Increased settlement and oil and gas development continue to fragment wolf ecosystems in the Northern Rockies and the landscapes that connect them. A recent genetics study determined that Yellowstone wolves are isolated from wolves in central Idaho, largely because wolves cannot travel between the ecosystems without getting killed. Much more must be done to protect habitat within and between the ecosystems where wolves live.

Reduce wolf/livestock conflicts

States should be required to utilize existing non-lethal tools and to develop new ways to minimize conflicts. More than half the wolf packs in Idaho and Wyoming overlap grazing allotments on public lands, where the Forest Service could help reduce conflicts by improving grazing practices.

Revise recovery plan to include new information on wolf genetics and habitat needs. The federal wolf recovery plan was drafted 20 years ago when there were only a handful of wolves in the Northern Rockies. In reaction to opposition to the wolf reintroduction, the government set recovery goals low, at 100 wolves in each state. Today, after collecting data about genetic and habitat requirements, biologists have called for population viability studies and a revision of the recovery goals to reflect today's science. Geneticists have said several thousand wolves are needed to maintain the long-term health of Northern Rockies wolves.

"Protecting Wolves in the American West." Natural Resources Defense Council Fact Sheet. Jan. 2008. 23 Feb. 2008. <<http://www.nrdc.org/wildlife/animals/wolves/wolves.pdf>>

The Natural Resources Defense Council's purpose is to safeguard the Earth: its people, its plants and animals and the natural systems on which all life depends. We work to restore the integrity of the elements that sustain life -- air, land and water -- and to defend endangered natural places. We seek to establish sustainability and good stewardship of the Earth as central ethical imperatives of human society. NRDC affirms the integral place of human beings in the environment. We strive to protect nature in ways that advance the long-term welfare of present and future generations. We work to foster the fundamental right of all people to have a voice in decisions that affect their environment. We seek to break down the pattern of disproportionate environmental burdens borne by people of color and others who face social or economic inequities. Ultimately, NRDC strives to help create a new way of life for humankind, one that can be sustained indefinitely without fouling or depleting the resources that support all life on Earth.

"Mission Statement." Natural Resources Defense Council. <<http://www.nrdc.org/about/mission.asp>>

“Rancher Violates Endangered Species Act by Killing Wolf to Save Cattle”

Randy Hall
CNSNews.com

Document Excerpt #2

Oct 1, 2007 - A Montana rancher killed a wolf to protect his cattle herd, and now federal officials say he violated the Endangered Species Act. This apparently extreme instance led one conservative analyst to claim that the act is doing more harm than good, because it forces landowners to “shoot, shovel and shut up.” Roger Lang is a California entrepreneur who owns the 18,000-acre Sun Ranch, south of Ennis, Mont. Over the last 10 years he has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to help ensure that his ranch is set up and operates legally, especially in conformity with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Lang has experimented with fences, herders, and other nonfatal means to prevent his livestock from being killed by wolves, which had virtually been wiped out in the area during the 1970s but were reintroduced by federal officials in 1994.

After five yearling heifers were killed this summer, Lang decided to become more aggressive in dealing with the pack, which numbered 13 wolves, including seven pups. “That’s a lot of mouths to feed,” the ranch owner, who obtained a permit to kill two adult wolves on his property, told the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*. Instead, Lang’s employees, shooting from a distance, killed a pup in July and wounded the pack’s alpha female. As a result of those injuries, the female was unable to run with the pack and spent the next two weeks hovering near the rancher’s cattle, seeking easy prey.

But an employee on an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) saw the wounded animal and began chasing it. After hitting the wolf several times, the employee pinned it under the vehicle, Lang said. “Once it was pinned down, it was trying to take (the employee’s) leg off,” Lang said. “He couldn’t jump off the ATV. What would happen if the wolf escaped? He did the best he could with an awkward situation.” A colleague eventually arrived and shot the animal, said Lang.

In a written statement, Lang called the pup’s death “an honest mistake” and said: “I accept ultimate responsibility for this event because I set a tone that proved to be too aggressive. I also accept responsibility for any lapses in the training of my ranch team.”

While Ed Bangs, wolf recovery coordinator of the Northern Rocky Mountains for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, told Cybercast News Service on Friday that he couldn’t comment on the specifics of the case, he did provide information regarding Section 10j of the Endangered Species Act, which Lang has been charged with violating. “When we reintroduced wolves in 1994, we passed special regulations that allowed landowners to shoot a wolf that was actually biting or grasping their livestock on their private land,” Bangs said. “The idea was to provide flexibility that’s not normally in the Act.” Eleven years later, he said, “we liberalized those rules” to allow a farmer or a rancher and their employees or family members on their private land or their grazing allotments “to shoot any wolf they thought was in the act of attacking their livestock.”

Bangs emphasized that the phrase “in the act” is defined as “chasing, molesting and harassing so that an attack is imminent. You’re allowed to do that without a permit” even though “you can’t trap them, you can’t poison them, and you can’t hunt them on your place.” “We also issue shoot-on-sight permits in places that have had chronic problems” with wolves, he stated, but they aren’t “freebies to hunt down wolves anywhere. The federal regulations are still in place.” “In some situations, guys go beyond the spirit of the law and the rules, and they end up doing stuff they shouldn’t do,” Bangs added. “In those situations, they can be prosecuted.”

“Bad for species, bad for people”

However, Brian Seasholes, an adjunct scholar with the conservative National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA), told Cybercast News Service that "if someone like Roger Lang can't get along with the ESA, then maybe nobody can." The main threat to wildlife in the United States and worldwide is loss of habitat due to human activity, he said, and "the feds clamping down on Lang will have a chilling effect on the conservation of the wolf and other endangered species in Montana and other western U.S. states." "Wildlife authorities can't be everywhere, and more often than not, they aren't," added Seasholes, the author of an NCPA report entitled "Bad for Species, Bad for People: What's Wrong With the Endangered Species Act and How to Fix It." As a result, "land-owners are the ones who bear the true cost of living with wildlife."

Because farmers and ranchers tend to be "land rich and cash poor," they may decide to quietly "shoot, shovel and shut up" or, more detrimentally, "make their land inhospitable to wildlife by erecting high fences or eliminating sources of water, he stated. "That's the great tragedy of the Endangered Species Act," Seasholes added. "If one had deliberately tried to write a law that would do enormous harm to wildlife, it would be hard to top the ESA."

Back in Montana, Lang told Cybercast News Service that he regrets what happened and "totally supports" the ESA, even though he said the law is "vaguely worded," which leads to "misunderstandings" over its provisions. "The 24 wolves that were reintroduced in 1994 are now 1,200 in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana," Lang said. "If we don't manage them, there's going to be more and more conflict in which cattle will die, wolves will die, and people are going to make mistakes." "If we can play a small part in bringing the dialogue to a national, rational level, then we're delighted, even if we got our wrists slapped along the way," he added.

Hall, Randy. "Rancher Violates Endangered Species Act by Killing Wolf to Save Cattle. CNSNews.com. 1 Oct. 2007. 23 Feb. 2008.
<<http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewNation.asp?Page=/Nation/archive/200710/NAT20071001b.html>>

The Cybercast News Service was launched on June 16, 1998 as a news source for individuals, news organizations and broadcasters who put a higher premium on balance than spin and seek news that's ignored or under-reported as a result of media bias by omission. Study after study by the Media Research Center, the parent organization of CNSNews.com, clearly demonstrate a liberal bias in many news outlets – bias by commission and bias by omission – that results in a frequent double-standard in editorial decisions on what constitutes "news."

In response to these shortcomings, MRC Chairman L. Brent Bozell III founded CNSNews.com in an effort to provide an alternative news source that would cover stories that are subject to the bias of omission and report on other news subject to bias by commission. CNSNews.com endeavors to fairly present all legitimate sides of a story and debunk popular, albeit incorrect, myths about cultural and policy issues.

"History." CNSNews.com. 23 Feb. 2008.
<<http://www.cnsnews.com/corporate/history.asp>>

“Wyoming’s Wolf Plan Offers ‘Adequate Regulatory Mechanism’ to Manage Wolves, Feds Say”

Wyoming Game and Fish web site

Document Excerpt #3

CHEYENNE, Wyo. Dec. 14, 2007

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has approved Wyoming’s Gray Wolf Management Plan, calling it an “adequate regulatory mechanism” that meets the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Formal notification of the approval came in a letter yesterday from Service Director Dale Hall to Wyoming Game and Fish Department Director Terry Cleveland. In the letter, Hall wrote, “After careful review and consideration, we determined that the 2007 Plan will provide adequate regulatory mechanisms for conserving a recovered wolf population in Wyoming after delisting and meets the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.”

“The Fish and Wildlife Service’s acceptance of Wyoming’s wolf plan is an encouraging sign that wolves in our state will soon be removed from the Endangered Species List, and that Wyoming will be able to manage wolves on its own terms,” said Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal. “It has been a long and difficult road, and in our discussions we have achieved compromise on issues like the dual classification and the state’s ability to manage wolves in relation to their impact on elk and deer. I salute Wyoming Game and Fish Director Terry Cleveland and his staff for their hard work in developing the management plan. What remains, in terms of process, is for the feds to delist wolves by Feb. 28 of next year.”

Wyoming’s original wolf plan was rejected by the Service in 2004. With the passage of House Bill 0213 by the 2007 Wyoming Legislature, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission had latitude to adopt a new plan that met the requirements of the Service. The plan approved yesterday was adopted by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission on November 16, 2007. The Commission worked with the Service to make several significant changes to Wyoming’s original wolf plan and reviewed public comments before approving the plan and submitting

it to the Service. Under Wyoming’s approved plan, after delisting the Wyoming Game and Fish Department will assume management of wolves in that portion of the state where wolves will be classified as trophy game animals. In the remaining portions of the state, gray wolves will be classified as predatory animals.

The Service has determined that 15 breeding pairs of wolves will ensure Wyoming’s share of a fully recovered population. Wyoming’s plan commits the Game and Fish Department to maintaining at least seven breeding pairs of wolves in the state and primarily outside of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller Memorial Parkway. The remaining breeding pairs will be located primarily within Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller Memorial Parkway.

“Approval of Wyoming’s plan is a major step forward in the recovery of wolf populations in the northern Rocky Mountains and should help clear the way for removing them from the Endangered Species List this winter,” said Cleveland. “We’re pleased that the Service has worked with us to find a compromise. Credit goes to the Governor, the Legislature, the Attorney General, and the Commission for their hard work and efforts in moving wolf delisting to this point. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is fully prepared to assume management of wolves in Wyoming, and we are committed to ensuring a recovered population while managing this species in a way that makes sense for people who live and work in wolf country.”

To see the full text of the Service's letter approving Wyoming's wolf plan, go to the Wyoming Game and Fish web site at: USFWS 2007 Final Gray Wolf Management

Contact: Eric Keszler (307-777-4594)

"Wyoming's Wolf Plan Offers 'Adequate Regulatory Mechanism' to Manage Wolves, Feds Say." Wyoming Game and Fish. 14 Dec. 2007. 23 Feb. 2008. <http://gf.state.wy.us/downloads/htm/wolfplanapproved_1.htm>. 2008. <<http://gf.state.wy.us/admin/aboutus/index.asp>>

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has roots all the way back to the 1890's. This period in our history marks a major decline in the population of wild game in the state of Wyoming due to unlimited harvesting practices used by settlers. During that decade, the positions of State Fish Warden (1890) and State Game Warden (1899) were established to protect Wyoming's wildlife from dangers of over harvesting. These positions were dedicated to the replenishment of the wildlife in the area.

In 1921, the Game and Fish Commission was established to provide citizen oversight to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. The Commission is made up of seven (7) officials, appointed by the Governor, who each represent a region in the state. One official is appointed from each region, and each region consists of approximately three (3) counties in Wyoming. The Game and Fish is funded by the traditional "user pays" philosophy. This means that there is no general fund appropriated from the State for the Game and Fish. The funding comes mainly from the annual sales of licenses to hunters and fishermen.

"History." Wyoming Game and Fish 2002. 23 Feb

“N. Rockies Gray Wolf Removed From U.S. Endangered List”

Brian Handwerk

National Geographic News

Document Excerpt #4

Gray wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains are “thriving” and no longer in need of protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary of the Interior, announced today. Wolves affected by the decision are those living in what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) defines as the northern Rockies Distinct Population Segment (DPS). This zone includes Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, the eastern thirds of Washington and Oregon, and a small area of north-central Utah. Settlers had eliminated wolves from the area before controversial reintroduction efforts began about a decade ago.

“In 1995 and '96 the Department of Interior reintroduced 66 wolves into federal lands in the region,” Scarlett said. “Today the northern Rocky Mountain population totals more than 1,500 wolves.” David Mech is a senior research scientist for the U.S. Geological Survey and chair of the World Conservation Union’s Wolf Specialist Group. “It’s great news [but] it’s not a surprise, because the biological criteria for delisting was met years and years ago,” Mech said.

The recovery goal was 30 breeding pairs among 300 wolves within the DPS for three consecutive years, he noted. Those criteria were met in 2002, and wolf numbers have increased every year since then. “The wolves took the opportunity that the Fish and Wildlife Service, states, and tribes gave them and ran with it,” Scarlett said. “The wolves are back.”

Conservation Success Story

Gray wolves first received federal protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1974. The Rocky Mountains delisting follows the removal of the western Great Lakes wolves from the endangered species list in early 2007. “Delisting the wolf is a very successful step forward in wolf management,” said Jess Edberg of the education nonprofit International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota. “The purpose of having the Endangered

Species Act is to prevent extinction. That goal has essentially been achieved, so it’s a success story. The ESA was never meant to be a perpetual protection act.”

Any continental U.S. gray wolves roaming outside of the Rockies and Great Lakes regions—including a third population in the Southwest—will not be affected by the ruling and will retain their endangered status.

Any wolves that wander out of the northern Rockies DPS would also be federally protected. But Ed Bangs, the USFWS wolf recovery coordinator in Helena, Montana, said such moves are rare, and the probability of a breeding pair establishing a new population elsewhere is slim. “The northern Rocky Mountains [provide] unusually suitable habitat,” he said. “There’s very little suitable habitat in other places—the habitat has been so modified by human use that wolves are really going to have a tough time fitting in.”

Hunter Becomes the Hunted?

The delisting means that state officials and Native American tribes will soon manage their own wolf populations to sustain numbers at a healthy level while reducing conflicts with humans. Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming have each committed to maintaining at least 15 breeding pairs and 150 wolves. Actual state management plans call for total wolf numbers of around 900 to 1,250 animals in mid-winter, Bangs said. The International Wolf Center’s Edberg noted that the new management plans are sure to ignite some controversy.

“Delisting is very alarming for some conservation groups concerned about hunting and trapping laws being set,” she said. “It’s also [a concern] among those who feel that, without [hunting] seasons, they are not going to be able to protect their livelihood, whether it’s ranching or taking tourists on an elk hunt.” She feels such passions are heightened in the

West, where cultural views toward wolves differ from those in Great Lakes states such as Minnesota, where the animals were never eliminated. "In the Rockies you have a culture where wolves were eradicated and decades later were put here again," she said. "It's a process learning to deal with that large predator."

Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming are currently developing plans for sporting hunts to control the newly recovered populations, but Bangs believes those increased kills will have little impact on overall numbers. "The bottom line is right now about 26 percent of all adult-size wolves die or are killed every year," he said. "Each year we remove about 10 percent of the population due to conflicts with livestock. [Others fall victim to] illegal kills, being hit on the roads, or wolves killing wolves. "Despite that, the population has been expanding some 24 percent per year. Wolves are incredibly resilient."

Some environmentalists adamantly disagree, which means that before any actual shots are fired, legal action is a distinct possibility. Still, Edberg expressed confidence that the darkest days are in the past for the wolves of the Rockies. "USFWS is dedicated to preserving this population. It isn't just going to walk away and let a state kill all the wolves," she said. "[The wolves] are going to be monitored under a five-year plan to make sure the states do what they said they would do and ensure that the wolf population will never again be placed under the Endangered Species Act."

Handwerk, Brian. "N. Rockies Gray Wolf Removed From U.S. Endangered List." *National Geographic News*. 21 Feb. 2008

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/02/080221-wolf-endangered_2.html>

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<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/index.html>>