

Judge Returns Gray Wolves to Endangered List

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By FELICITY BARRINGER
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Gray wolves in the greater Yellowstone area of the northern Rocky Mountains, which would have been fair game for hunters in three states as a result of a federal government decision in March, were again put under the protections of the Endangered Species Act by a judge in Montana on Friday.

Readers' Opinions

The action by the judge, Donald W. Molloy of Federal District Court, took the form of a preliminary injunction and could be reversed. But Judge Molloy's language showed serious reservations about the [Fish and Wildlife Service](#)'s decision to remove endangered species protections for the wolves.

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Environmental groups, including Defenders of Wildlife and the [Sierra Club](#), which sued the [Interior Department](#) and the Fish and Wildlife Service on behalf of the wolves, persuaded Judge Molloy that

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there was a possibility of irreparable harm to the species if hunts had been allowed.

The states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming; the [National Rifle Association](#); and a variety of hunting and cattlemen’s associations intervened on the federal government’s behalf.

The judge said the decision by the Fish and Wildlife Service last year to approve Wyoming’s plans for maintaining just eight breeding pairs instead of the 15 the federal government once required was “problematic.” He added that the decision, which ran counter to the federal government’s earlier rejection of the Wyoming plan, “represents an agency change of course unsupported by adequate reasoning.”

Doug Honnold, the lawyer for Earthjustice, said in an e-mail message: “This is great news for wolves. All three states had plans to allow hunts this fall, 500 wolves were scheduled to be killed.” Spokesmen for the Interior Department could not be immediately reached for comment.

Eric Keszler, spokesman for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department said, “Obviously we are disappointed in the decision,” which he said had not yet been fully reviewed. “We’re confident that Wyoming’s wolf management plan is adequate to maintaining a recovered wolf population in the state.”

The fate of wolves has been the subject of bitter litigation since they were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995.

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