

Agency to Reconsider Taking Gray Wolves Off Endangered Species List

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HELENA, Mont. The federal agency that removed the gray wolf from the endangered species list in March has changed its mind and is asking a federal judge to vacate the decision.

The request, by the United States [Fish and Wildlife Service](#), follows a temporary order by Judge Donald Molloy of Federal District Court in Missoula, Mont., against the service's decision in March to remove the wolf from the list. The agency said then that the wolf population in the Northern Rockies had fully recovered.

The order stopped a plan to allow hunting of the wolves in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming until a lawsuit by environmentalists challenging the wolves' removal from the endangered species list could be heard.

On Monday the Fish and Wildlife Service asked Judge Molloy to vacate the delisting and allow officials to reconsider their finding and further study the issue.

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“We are going to take a look at everything again and address the concerns expressed to us by the judge and everyone else,” said Sharon Rose of the service’s Mountain Prairie Office.

Environmentalists were pleased by the agency’s action. “We’re delighted by the request to redo the plan,” said Louisa Wilcox, of the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#). “It clearly reflects the fact that there were problems with the plan.”

The environmentalists’ lawsuit, filed in July, said among other things that a plan to control the wolf population relied too heavily on killing the animals, rather than on nonlethal means of control. They also said the wolves’ genetics, which dictate their long-term survivability, were not well understood.

The reconsideration of the listing was not related to a recently announced decline in the wolf population in the Rockies. Wildlife officials counted 1,455 animals this summer, down from 1,545 a year ago. It was the first drop in more than 10 years and officials said they were not sure why.

The first wolf hunting season, scheduled for this fall, was delayed after Judge Molloy’s order. If the judge grants the Fish and Wildlife Service’s request, it will be further delayed until the re-evaluation is complete.

But state and federal agents in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming will still be allowed to kill problem wolves that threaten livestock. Since wolves returned to the West in the 1990s federal agents have killed more than 1,000 wolves, and last year 186 problem wolves were killed in the three states.

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