

IDAHO FISH AND GAME
HEADQUARTERS NEWS RELEASE
Boise, ID

Date: January 29, 2007

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Wolf Delisting Process Announced

Idaho wildlife managers are excited by the news that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Monday, January 29, announced its proposal to remove the gray wolf in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming from the endangered species list.

“We’re in the process now of delisting the wolf,” said Cal Groen, director of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. “We’re excited about that.”

In a news conference Monday, Deputy Secretary of Interior Lynn Scarlett and Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dale Hall announced the proposed delisting of gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains and the delisting of wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

About 12 years ago 66 gray wolves were reintroduced to central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park. Today those wolves number more than 1,200, Scarlett said. More than 700 of them are in Idaho, she said.

“I look forward, as do all the states that have been involved in wolf recovery, to returning management of the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains to the states,” Hall said.

The states are in a better position to manage delisted wolves, he said. And he is confident that states will be responsible managers. State wildlife agencies will continue to submit annual reports on wolf status in each state, Hall said.

“Wolves have made a comeback,” Groen said during a news conference Monday afternoon. “It’s a successful recovery story.”

The Fish and Wildlife Service delisting proposal will be open for public comment for 60 days, including a series of public meetings and hearings. Fish and Wildlife will analyze the comments and expects to issue a final rule by the end of the year, Hall said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service plans a series of public hearings on the delisting proposal in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Washington, Oregon and Utah.

Public meetings will run from 3 to 5 p.m., including brief presentations on the proposal at 3 and 4 p.m. Fish and Wildlife officials will take formal public comments during public hearings from 6 to 8 p.m. in each location.

Meetings will be March 6, at the Boise Convention Center on the Grove, 850 W. Front St., Boise; and March 8, at the Oxford Inns & Suites, 15015 East Indiana Avenue, Spokane Valley, Wash.

Other meetings will be February 27, at the Holiday Inn Cheyenne, 204 West Fox Farm Road, Cheyenne, Wyo.; February 28, at the Plaza Hotel, 122 West South Temple, Salt Lake City; March 1, at Jorgenson's Inn & Suites, 1714 11th Avenue, Helena, Mont.; and March 7, at the Pendleton Red Lion Inn, 304 S.E. Nye Street, Pendleton, Ore.

Written comments on the proposed delisting may be sent electronically to NRMGraywolf@fws.gov; mailed to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wolf Delisting, 585 Shepard Way, Helena, Mont. 59601; or hand-delivered to that address.

In anticipation of the completion of the delisting process, Fish and Game has started working on plans for hunting seasons on wolves. The Fish and Game Commission on January 25 agreed to ask the Legislature for changes in state law that would allow Fish and Game to issue tags and set the price of a wolf tag at \$26.50.

Officials are working on a wolf hunting and species management plan under the guidelines of the Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan that would reduce wolf numbers in areas of conflict and try to stabilize numbers across the rest of the state.

Fish and Game's large carnivore manager Steve Nadeau has assembled a planning team that includes the Fish and Game wildlife managers and wolf specialists. The process will include public surveys and meetings with select groups of public and stakeholder groups to help guide a draft plan.

It's premature to talk about numbers or how the animals would be hunted. But the goal of population management would be to reduce conflicts, he said. A draft plan would be submitted to the commission for approval in May before it is released for public review and comments.

Fish and Game officials expect to have a final plan for hunting delisted wolves in Idaho ready for Commission approval in November. An actual hunting season on wolves could be months or years away depending on the outcome of the delisting process.