



# ESA & Wolves Under Attack

*Several bills have been introduced or proposed to strip federal protections for wolves under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). These bills would weaken the ESA and have devastating impacts on wolves nationwide.*

## WOLF RECOVERY: A NATIONAL SUCCESS STORY

**The return of the wolf has been one of America's greatest wildlife conservation success stories.**

Following aggressive extermination campaigns in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wolves were essentially wiped out in the lower 48 states. However, under the protection of the Endangered Species Act, wolves were restored to the Northern Rockies and Southwest and have made a strong comeback in the western Great Lakes region.

## SECURING HEALTHY WOLF POPULATIONS

**Proposed legislation would allow states to drastically reduce or even eliminate wolf populations, jeopardizing long-term recovery of the species.**

Bills recently introduced in both the House and Senate would permanently block gray wolves from receiving ESA protection. If enacted, these bills would:

1. Eliminate any federal requirement for states to maintain healthy wolf populations above a science-based threshold.
2. Eliminate any ability to restore ESA protections if states fail to maintain sufficient numbers of wolves.

Idaho and Wyoming have repeatedly shown their intent to manage wolves down to the absolute minimum required by law. Other states with struggling wolf populations are likely to follow suit. Idaho's official position, adopted by the state legislature in 2001, is to remove all wolves by whatever means necessary. Wyoming's current wolf management plan would allow wolves to be shot on sight in 90 percent of the state. In the Southwest, the 50 wolves that survive in the wild would lose all protection and surely be doomed. The bills under consideration would essentially authorize the killing of hundreds of wolves, or worse yet, the elimination of wolves from much of their current range.

## The Science of Recovery

The existing recovery goals laid out in 1987 only require states in the Northern Rockies to maintain minimum populations of approximately 100 wolves per state. Significant scientific work in the past 24 years suggests that a larger number of wolves across the entire region may be necessary to ensure sufficient interbreeding and healthy genetic exchange. **The outdated minimum population targets should be updated based on the best available science before wolves are delisted.** Otherwise states are free to manage wolves down to unsustainable levels, undermining this great conservation success story.



## UPHOLDING SCIENCE AND THE ESA

**Proposed legislation would unravel the ESA and compromise protections for all imperiled wildlife.**

For nearly four decades, the Endangered Species Act has set the standard in the U.S. and around the world for protecting imperiled wildlife. Bald eagles, Florida manatees, American alligators, grizzly bears and California condors—to name a few—were all brought back from the brink of extinction with the help of the ESA.

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The backbone of the ESA has always been its commitment to science. This commitment has taken conservation and wildlife management out of the realm of politics and put them where they belong: in the hands of professional wildlife managers and biologists. The latest wolf bills would set a terrible precedent by allowing Congress to overrule experts and discard sound science.



## A BETTER FUTURE FOR WOLVES

**Wolves can be properly delisted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service without sacrificing the ESA.**

Any delisting effort must uphold three core principles:

1. Ensure a healthy, sustainable number of wolves;
2. Apply sound, scientific wildlife management; and
3. Provide a viable safety net through the ESA.

Stripping ESA protections for political reasons will undo decades of wolf recovery, unravel the ESA and leave many other species vulnerable. It will also open the floodgates for other species to be denied ESA protection whenever it's politically convenient.

Congress has wisely and courageously stood up for America's imperiled plants and animals in the past and must do so again. The future of the ESA, wolves and all our nation's cherished wildlife is at risk.

## Wolves Benefit Ecosystem and Economy

**As top predators, wolves help maintain healthy, balanced ecosystems.** The return of wolves to Yellowstone National Park is an excellent case study in the marvels of nature. During the several decades that wolves were absent from the park, elk numbers exploded to unsustainable levels. Elk grazed too heavily on streamside willow and aspen trees and damaged other native vegetation, requiring extreme management strategies to reduce their numbers. In turn, fewer willow and aspen trees contributed to a severe decline in beaver populations. Without beavers building dams, there were fewer ponds, wetlands and eddies for birds, insects, fish and plants that depend on them, and less water stored above and below ground. No wolves also meant more coyotes, which led to fewer pronghorn antelope and red foxes.

After wolves were restored, the ripple effects were seen in reverse as the entire ecosystem rebounded. Elk numbers and grazing behavior have returned to normal. As a result, willow and aspen stands have recovered, and songbirds and beavers have returned (before there was one beaver colony in the park, now there are 12). Bears and birds benefit once again from the bounty provided by wolf kills. With fewer coyotes, pronghorn antelope and red fox numbers are also up.

**Wolves bring \$35 million annually in tourist revenue to the Greater Yellowstone area.** A 2006 study by University of Montana researchers found that more than 150,000 people visited Yellowstone specifically because of wolves. These visitors account for an estimated \$35 million in annual revenue. The economic impact of wolf tourism effectively doubles once that money filters through the local economy. Since the study, the number of visitors to Yellowstone has soared. Park visitation records have been repeatedly set and broken in recent years.