

AS THE WORLD TURNS: MANAGING WOLVES AND NAVIGATING THE LEGAL LABYRINTH

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This is the 29th year that wolves (*Canis lupus*) have been in northwest Montana and the 14th year that wolves have been in southwest Montana. It's the 5th year Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has led wolf management. And it's the 7th straight year in which the northern Rockies biological recovery goal was met. The real success story is that roughly 88 percent of the recovered wolf population lives outside national parks. Through it all, science has advanced and the rhetoric has ebbed and flowed. Somewhere in the midst are the biological, political, and social realities of managing a recovered population. Outside national parks, wolves share a landscape with people who have very diverse viewpoints about wolves and their management. Like other wildlife species, Montana's wolf population is subject to checks and balances, including strong reproduction in some areas, disease, vehicle strikes, and mortality due to conflicts with people. Montana's population is secure, but dynamic. At the end of 2007, Montana had a minimum of 422 wolves in 73 packs, 39 of which were breeding pairs. In 2008, the legal framework was equally dynamic when federal government efforts to delist the northern Rockies population were challenged. Wolves were delisted for about 4 mos before a federal judge reinstated federal legal protections through a preliminary injunction and then permanently when the federal government withdrew its decision. Delisting efforts were renewed late in 2008 and carried forward into 2009. This will be summarized and an FWP program update will be provided. See also: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf