

**RECOVERY AND DELISTING OF THE GRAY WOLF
IN MONTANA, IDAHO, AND WYOMING^{TWS}**

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Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) populations were eliminated from the western United States by 1930. Naturally dispersing wolves from Canada recolonized northwestern Montana in the 1980s. In 1995 and 1996 wolves from western Canada were reintroduced to central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. By late 2003, about 750 wolves were being managed in those three states under the federal Endangered Species Act. Wolf recovery proceeded

more quickly, with more benefits (public viewing and restoration of ecological processes) and fewer problems (livestock and pets depredations) than predicted. However, between 1987 and December 2002, a minimum of 237 cattle, 593 sheep, 57 dogs, a horse, and 9 llamas were killed by wolves and nearly \$275,000 was paid from a private damage compensation fund. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service relocated 117 wolves and killed over 150 to reduce future conflicts. Management also included non-lethal tools such harassment, barriers, guard animals, altering wolf activity patterns, livestock management, and practical research. Confirmed livestock loss from wolves is regionally uncommon, i.e., wolves caused 0.04 percent and 0.03 percent of all sheep and cattle deaths in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming in 2000, but is inordinately controversial and significantly affected a few producers. Many hunters perceived that wolf predation dramatically reduced elk populations and hunter harvest and this issue became extremely controversial. Because over 85 percent of adult wolf mortality is human-caused, the interagency recovery program emphasizes resolving the concerns of local people to increase their tolerance of wolves. Wolves were reclassified from endangered to threatened status in April 2003 to recognize their recovery and to increase options for problem wolf management. Litigation by some environmental groups over reclassification is ongoing. The wolf population achieved its numerical, distribution and temporal recovery goal in December 2002. Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming finalized their state wolf management plans by September 2003. They will regulate human-caused mortality through defense of property regulations and public harvest programs so that wolves will not again be jeopardized with extinction. A proposal to delist wolves could occur by early 2004, and by late 2004 wolves could be managed solely by the states.

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