

**STATUS OF GRAY WOLF RESTORATION IN MONTANA, IDAHO,
AND WYOMING ^{TWS}**

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Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) populations were eliminated from Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, as well as adjacent southwestern Canada by the 1930s. After human-caused mortality of wolves in southwestern Canada began to be regulated in the 1960s, populations began expanding southward. Dispersing individuals occasionally reached the northern Rocky Mountains of the United States, but lacked legal protection there until 1974, after passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. In 1986 wolves from Canada successfully raised a litter of pups in Glacier National Park, Montana, and a small population was soon established. The Recovery Plan for the wolf in the northern Rockies of the United States identified northwestern Montana, central Idaho, and the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) as recovery areas and established a biological goal of at least 30 breeding pairs of

wolves throughout these 3 areas for 3 successive years. In 1995 and 1996 wolves from western Canada were reintroduced to remote public lands in central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park. Those wolves were designated as nonessential experimental populations to increase management flexibility and address local and state concerns. The Service proposed to reclassify endangered wolves in northwestern Montana to threatened status and manage them similarly to the wolves in the experimental population areas. That proposal should be finalized by July 2001. Wolf restoration is rapidly occurring in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming and there were at least 25 breeding pairs in December 2000. Currently there are about 61 wolves in northwestern Montana, 185 wolves in central Idaho, and 164 wolves in the GYA. Dispersal of wolves between Canada, Montana and Idaho has been documented but only 1 wolf has successfully traveled to or from the Yellowstone area. Occasional lone wolves are expected to disperse into adjacent states but pack establishment outside of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming is probably not imminent. At the current rate of population growth the gray wolf in the northwestern U.S. should be recovered and, depending on the status of state and tribal wolf management plans, could be proposed to be removed from the ESA within 3-5 years. Wolf restoration has proceeded more quickly and with more benefits, such as public viewing than predicted. Problems, including confirmed livestock depredations, have been lower than estimated. Wolves have restored an important ecological process to several large wild areas in the northern Rocky Mountains of the U.S. The program has been widely publicized and is generally viewed as very successful.