

GRAY WOLF RESTORATION IN THE NORTHWESTERN UNITED STATES^{TWS}

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Sixty years after being exterminated, the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) was listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and restored to Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Recovery efforts in northwestern Montana began in the late 1970's and encouraged natural dispersal from nearby Canadian wolf populations. Wolves first denned there in 1986 and about 80 wolves now live in the area. Livestock losses annually averaged 5 cattle and 4 sheep. After years of planning and exhaustive public involvement, 61 wolves were reintroduced to wilderness areas in central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming in 1995 and 1996. Those wolves were designated as nonessential experimental populations to increase management flexibility. Wolves adapted better than predicted and by late 1998 there were 110-120 wolves in each area. Wolves settled primarily on remote public lands. The wolf restoration program caused no disruption of traditional human activities such as logging, mining, livestock grazing, hunting, or wildland recreation. Over 30,000 visitors to Yellowstone National Park have seen wolves and public interest in them is extremely high. Livestock losses have been lower than predicted, annually averaging 2 cattle, 20 sheep, and 1 dog in the Yellowstone area and 4 cattle, 13 sheep, and 1 dog in central Idaho. Livestock producers who experienced wolf-caused losses were compensated about \$70,000 by a private fund. The interagency wolf recovery program concentrates its efforts on interacting with people who live near wolves and removing the few wolves that do cause conflicts. Wolf populations should be fully recovered (30 packs for 3 successive years) and will no longer need protection under the ESA in 2002.