

Non-Wyoming wolves delisted again

This past March, in an attempt to offer a workable solution to the increasingly polarized debate over wolves, the Alliance and nine other conservation groups reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of the Interior regarding wolf management. However, a federal judge rejected it in early April. Then, on April 15, President Barack Obama signed a budget bill passed by Congress that included a rider stripping Endangered Species Act protections from wolves in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Utah.

This marks the first time Congress has taken a species off the endangered species list, and sets an extremely bad precedent placing politics over science in management decisions.

Protections for some 1,300 Northern Rockies gray wolves were lifted effective with a notice published on May 5 in the Federal Register. In the notice, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reissued the 2009 delisting rule for wolves in the region, and Idaho and Montana are already planning public hunts for hundreds of wolves.

For the time being, though, Endangered Species Act protections remain in place for wolves in Wyoming, because its present management plan allows wolves to be killed



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on sight in most of the state. But this could change, since Wyoming officials are trying to come up with a revised management plan ac-

ceptable to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In spite of the political machinations by which wolves were removed from Endangered Species Act protection, it's important to keep in mind that the return of the wolf to the Northern Rockies is a remarkable achievement in wildlife conservation. Twenty years ago, no wolves lived in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem; today, nearly 1,700 roam the region – some 500 in the Greater Yellowstone alone. The reintroduction in 1995 and 1996 of 31 Canadian-born wolves to Yellowstone National Park helped restore a balance that had existed for thousands of years prior to the wolves' extermination in the early 1900s. Now, it's up to the western states to show they can manage wolves in a way that ensures survival of the species.

As far as Wyoming goes, the Alliance believes that the state needs to use the best available science for a wolf management plan that will work for the health of all species – predators and prey alike. Our goal is for wolves outside of the national parks to be managed as trophy game – not as animals that can be killed on sight – in as much of the state as possible.

We're also working to encourage the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission to use the best science in managing wolves to ensure their long-term viability. Visit www.jhalliance.org/issueswolves.htm for background info. ■

Wolverines warrant protection; denied due to backlog

This past December, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that wolverines warrant protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, but decided to withhold those protections indefinitely due to the backlog of other species in more imminent danger of becoming extinct. According to Louise Lasley, Alliance public lands director, "The good news is that their low numbers and diminishing habitat have been recognized as significant factors in wolverine survival. The bad news is that they have been added to a growing list of species that have to wait until they eventually reach a critical threshold to be listed as threatened or endangered." Visit www.jhalliance.org/Library/PressReleases/2010/WolverineESAruling.12-10.pdf for details. ■

Appeal heard on reducing spread of Refuge diseases

In mid-May, a federal court heard arguments in our appeal of an April 2010 decision regarding the National Elk Refuge's elk and bison management plan; a ruling is pending. The Alliance, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Defenders of Wildlife and Wyoming Outdoor Council had all joined forces in 2008 to dispute a final decision made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a plan to manage elk and bison on the refuge. We argued that the plan needed to have a set timeline for ending the refuge's current feeding program, which leads to the spread of brucellosis and hoof rot, and leaves the elk herd vulnerable to chronic wasting disease. Last April, a federal judge ruled against us, stating that a set end time wasn't necessary, since the refuge did plan on eventually ending the program. Earthjustice filed the appeal of that decision on behalf of the coalition. ■

National Elk Refuge conservation plan in the works

Many species of wildlife besides elk and bison – at least 47 mammal species and nearly 175 species of birds – exist on the nearly 25,000-acre National Elk Refuge. In January, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials began working on a "comprehensive conservation plan" for the refuge that will spell out how these other species – as well as visitor activities, such as hunting, fishing and wildlife-viewing – will be managed for the next 15 years. We'll keep you posted at www.jhalliance.org/allianceaction.htm on opportunities to comment as this progresses. ■

Future looking up for lynx as two appeals are dropped

In January, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dropped its appeal of last summer's ruling that the service had illegally excluded some areas in Montana, Idaho and Colorado as critical lynx habitat. This means that the service will likely add to the 39,000 square miles already so designated, although it's uncertain when they'll get to it. Then in March, a coalition of snowmobiling groups also dropped their appeal in a related case involving lynx habitat. The upshot is that the nation's lynx, which were designated as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2000, should have a better chance of survival in coming years. ■

Don't Poach the Powder Campaign helps wildlife!

This past winter, our maps at www.jhalliance.org/dontpoach.pdf showing areas closed in winter to protect wildlife were downloaded more than 1,000 times! Our ads and brochures also reached many more locals and visitors, spreading the word that avoiding closed areas helps wildlife survive Jackson Hole's harsh winters. ■