



**Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance**

(307) 733-9417 • [www.jhalliance.org](http://www.jhalliance.org)

## ***News Release***

**For Immediate Release: 9/9/09**

**CONTACT:** Jenny Harbine, Earthjustice, (406) 586-9699  
Suzanne Asha Stone, Defenders of Wildlife, (208) 861-4655  
Louisa Willcox, Natural Resources Defense Council, (406) 222-9561  
Melanie Stein, Sierra Club, (307) 733-4557  
Noah Greenwald, Center for Biological Diversity, (503) 484-7495

### **Court finds wolf delisting is likely unlawful; declines to stop wolf hunts**

Missoula, MT— Late Tuesday evening, a federal district court issued an order finding that the delisting of wolves in the northern Rockies was likely illegal, but declined to stop wolf hunts in Idaho and Montana. In the ruling, the Court stated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision to remove protections from wolves in Idaho and Montana while retaining protections for Wyoming wolves appeared to be “a practical determination that does not seem to be scientifically based.”

The court order came in an ongoing lawsuit seeking to restore federal Endangered Species Act protections to wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains until wolf numbers are stronger, the states develop an adequate legal safety net, and connectivity between recovery areas is assured. The order came just over a week after Idaho’s wolf hunting season opened on September 1 in two of the state’s 12 hunting units. Montana is set to begin wolf hunting on September 15.

Idaho authorized the killing of 220 wolves in a wolf hunt, which represents 25 percent of the last official Idaho wolf population estimate at the end of December 2008. Montana has authorized the take of 75 wolves in a wolf hunt, which is 15 percent of its last official wolf population estimate.

The court declined to stop the hunts because it held that a single hunting season at these levels in Idaho and Montana would not “irreparably harm” the wolf population as a whole.

The wolf hunting is in addition to wolf killing due to livestock conflicts, defense-of-property wolf killing, and natural mortality, which last year accounted for more than 200 wolf deaths in Idaho and Montana. The hunting would occur throughout the states, including in core wilderness regions where wolves have virtually no conflicts with livestock. The combined loss of all these wolves threatens the recovery of the still-vulnerable regional wolf population in the northern Rockies.

Under the challenged U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wolf delisting rule, Idaho and Montana are free to reduce the wolf population down to 150 per state – a potential loss of roughly two-thirds of the region’s wolves. No other endangered species has ever been delisted at such a low population level and then immediately hunted to even lower unsustainable levels.

The wolf hunts threaten to cripple the regional wolf population by isolating wolves into disconnected subgroups incapable of genetic or ecological sustainability. The wolf hunts would also allow the killing of the breeding “alpha” male and female wolves, thereby disrupting the social group, leaving pups more vulnerable.

Wolves are still under federal protection in Wyoming because a federal court previously ruled that Wyoming's hostile wolf management scheme leaves wolves in "serious jeopardy." The Fish and Wildlife Service in the recent past held that a state-by-state approach to delisting wolves was not permitted under the Endangered Species Act, but the federal government flip flopped on its earlier position and this year took wolves in Idaho and Montana off the endangered species list while leaving those in Wyoming on the list.

In addition to Wyoming, the states of Idaho and Montana have refused to make enforceable commitments to maintain viable wolf populations within their borders.

Earthjustice represents Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity, The Humane Society of the United States, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Friends of the Clearwater, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands, Western Watersheds Project, Wildlands Network, and Hells Canyon Preservation Council.

####

"We're disappointed that wolves will continue to be hunted in the short term, but we're very encouraged that the court has expressed agreement that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acted illegally by delisting wolves under the current rule." Suzanne Stone, Northern Rockies representative for Defenders of Wildlife.

"In the big picture, this is a win," said Louisa Willcox, Senior Wildlife Advocate for NRDC. "We feel good about the judge's analysis of the merits of our case. The Department of Interior has clearly missed an opportunity to get this right. We need a national wolf recovery plan and this piecemeal effort just won't get us there."

"We are encouraged by the fact that Judge Molloy agrees that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service violated the Endangered Species Act when removing protections for wolves. However, we are disheartened that public hunting will be allowed to continue in Idaho and Montana this fall. Wolves are at the brink of recovery in the northern Rockies and we believe a public hunt is premature and could negatively impact their chance to make a full recovery." Melanie Stein, Sierra Club representative.

"Today's order affirms that removal of protections for wolves in the northern Rockies before they have fully recovered was illegal," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species program director with the Center for Biological Diversity. "Although the court's decision to leave wolves unprotected is a setback for recovery, we hope it is a temporary one."

"Here in Oregon, we just had two young wolves killed after conflicts with livestock," said Rob Klavins with the conservation group Oregon Wild. "The last thing our neighbors need to be doing is shooting these still recovering animals for sport. We hope that the state-sponsored hunts can be ended soon and recovery can begin once again." "In keeping with Judge Molloy's findings in this Order, WWP looks forward to the overturning of the delisting of wolves in the northern Rockies and the ending of hunting of wolves," said Jon Marvel, executive director of Western Watersheds Project.

"Today's ruling is a split decision," said Doug Honnold of Earthjustice, who represents the conservation groups in the wolf delisting lawsuit. "We are glad the court agreed with us that the Fish and Wildlife Service violated the Endangered Species Act. We are deeply saddened by the fact that the court decided not to stop the Idaho and Montana wolf hunts this year."

###

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to responsible land stewardship in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to ensure that human resources are in harmony with the area's irreplaceable wildlife, scenic and other natural resources.