February 18, 2015
An Open Letter to Members of Congress from Scientists on Federal Wolf Delisting

We, the undersigned scientists, are writing to express opposition to the prospect that Congress might act to delist gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) from the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The best available science indicates that the gray wolf occupies a mere fraction of its historic range and therefore has not yet recovered from centuries of systematic persecution. For this reason, and in recognition of the ecological benefits wolves bring millions of tourism dollars to local economies, and abundant knowledge from scientific study, we ask Congress to act to conserve the species for future generations.

The ESA requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to base all listing decisions “solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available” and that a species must be considered endangered if it is “at risk of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range” (Sections 3 and 4 of the ESA). A species is recovered when it no longer fits that definition and is unlikely to fit that definition in the foreseeable future. The best available science clearly indicates that wolves do not meet that standard — they occupy only a small portion of their former range—and that the species could occupy much more of its former range if the threats (primarily, human-caused mortality and inadequate regulatory mechanisms) were properly mitigated.

Despite this fact, the FWS has repeatedly removed federal ESA protections from wolves. It did so by distorting the plain meaning of the phrase, “significant portion of its range,” an important component of the ESA. Those distorted interpretations of the ESA are antithetical to what Congress intended when it enacted the ESA. Those distorted interpretations were also rejected by numerous federal courts that have ordered the FWS to restore federal protections to wolves, including two rulings in 2014 alone.

Currently, wolves are absent from most of the United States, with potentially secure populations in only a handful of states (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan). Yet, in those same states, the loss of federal protections resulted in state-sanctioned seasons on wolves at levels designed to reduce their populations to arbitrary goals, which were based on politics but not the best available science. For instance, since delisting, in Minnesota, the population has been reduced by 20 percent, and in Wisconsin, by at least 15 percent, but likely by more. Before a federal court intervened, the Wyoming Legislature ordered that 80 percent of the state be open to unlimited wolf killing. Killing of wolves in Montana and Wyoming has even included wolves that should enjoy protections in Yellowstone and Teton national parks — the place where thousands of tourists go annually just to see wolves and support rural economies.

In rare circumstances, individual livestock owners suffer from wolves killing their livestock. Assisting those livestock owners is both appropriate and readily accomplished through implementing non-lethal methods. Added to this, livestock growers benefit by managing wolves as “threatened” under the ESA, which permits lethal management under a Section 4(d) rule, allowing agencies to use lethal control of wolves to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts.

Some have expressed their concern for human safety, but such fears should not be an obstacle to recovery. While there has never been a record of a healthy wild wolf attacking a human in the lower 48 states, the ESA listing still allows lethal removal of wolves for human safety reasons.

For all of these reasons, we urge Congress to oppose any legislation to remove the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) from protections under the ESA. Wolves are an enormous asset to the biological diversity of our country and are well tolerated by the American public. After decades of making excellent progress
toward recovery, it would be a shame to stop before the final goal is accomplished.

Signed:

David M. Armstrong, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus  
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
University of Colorado  
Boulder, Colorado

Marc Bekoff, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus  
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
University of Colorado  
Boulder, Colorado

Bradley Bergstrom, Ph.D.  
Professor, Department of Biology  
Valdosta State University  
Valdosta, Georgia

Jim Berkelman, Ph.D.  
Faculty Associate  
Forest and Wildlife Ecology  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin

Robert L. Beschta, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus  
Forest Ecosystems and Society  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, Oregon

Goran E. D. Bloomberg, Ph.D.  
Wildlife Ecologist, retired  
Lansing, Michigan

Eugenia Bragina, Ph.D.  
Postdoctoral Research Associate  
Forest and Wildlife Ecology  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin

Barbara Brower, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Geography Department  
Portland State University  
Portland, Oregon

Jeremy Bruskotter, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
School of Environment and Natural Resources  
Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

Joseph K. Bump, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science  
Michigan Technological University  
Houghton, Michigan

Carlos Carroll, Ph.D.  
Director  
Klamath Center for Conservation Research  
Orleans, California

Amanda Cheeseman, Ph.D.  
Graduate Research Assistant  
Environmental Science and Forestry  
State University of New York  
Syracuse, New York

Robert Evans, M.S.  
Wildlife Biologist  
US Forest Service, retired  
Iron River, Michigan

Tracy S. Feldman, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Biology  
Department of Natural and Life Sciences  
St. Andrews University  
Laurinburg, North Carolina

Richard Fredrickson, Ph.D.  
Missoula, Montana

Bob Gillespie, Ph.D.  
Coordinator  
Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Wenatchee Valley College  
Wenatchee, Washington
Anthony J. Giordano, Ph.D.
Executive Director
S.P.E.C.I.E.S.
Ventura, California

Jacob R. Goheen, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Zoology & Physiology
University of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyoming

Craig K. Harris, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

Philip Hedrick, Ph.D.
Ullman Professor of Conservation Biology
School of Life Sciences
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona

Gretchen Kaufman, DVM
Assistant Director for Global Health Education and Training
Paul G. Allen School for Global Animal Health
Washington State University
Pullman, Washington

Ken Keefover-Ring, Ph.D.
Assistant Scientist
Department of Entomology
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Leah R. Knapp, D.V.M.
Professor of Biology
Biology Program Director
Department of Natural and Physical Sciences
Olivet College
Olivet, Michigan

Theresa L. Kong, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biology
Biology Department
William Rainey Harper College
Palatine, Illinois

Ralph Lampman, M.S.
Research Biologist
Department of Natural Resources
Yakama Nation, Prosser, Washington

James M. Le Moine, M.S.
Research Laboratory Specialist
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Jennifer Leonard, Ph.D.
Tenured Researcher
Department of Integrative Ecology
Estación Biológica de Doñana, CSIC
Seville, Spain

Richard L. Lindroth, Ph.D.
Professor and Associate Dean for Research
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Yan Linhart Ph.D.
Professor of Biology, Emeritus
Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
University of Colorado
El Cerrito, California (currently)

Malcolm R. MacPherson, Ph.D.
Scientist
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Stephen Malcolm, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Biological Sciences
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Jason P. Martina, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biology
Department of Mathematics and Sciences
Our Lady of the Lake University
San Antonio, Texas

Lisa Naughton, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of Geography
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin
Michael Paul Nelson, Ph.D.
Ruth H. Spaniol Chair of Renewable Resources and Professor of Environmental Philosophy and Ethics
Lead-PI, HJ Andrews LTER Program
Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon

William J. Ripple, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor of Ecology
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon

Daniel D. Roby, Ph.D
Professor
Department of Fisheries and Wildlife
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon

David Parsons, M.S.
Carnivore Conservation Biologist
The Rewilding Institute
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Steve Sheffield, Ph.D.
Adjunct Professor
College of Natural Resources and Environment
Virginia Tech
Falls Church, Virginia, and
Associate Professor
Department of Natural Sciences
Bowie State University, Maryland

Paul C. Paquet, Ph.D.
Adjunct Professor
Departments of Geography & Biology
University of Victoria
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Jeffrey W. Snyder, Ph.D.
Department of Biology
Western Oregon University
Monmouth, Oregon

Kathleen Perillo, M.S.
Professor
Biology and Environmental Science
Clark College
Vancouver, Washington

John M. Stewart, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
Psychobiology
Northland College
Washburn, Wisconsin

Rolf Peterson, Ph.D.
Robbins Professor of Sustainable Management of the Environment
School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science
Michigan Technological University
Houghton, Michigan

Heather Stricker, M.S.
Certified Wildlife Biologist, retired
Rhinelander, Wisconsin

Stuart Pimm, Ph.D.
Doris Duke Professor of Conservation
Nicholas School of the Environment
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

Michael Soule, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
Environmental Studies
UC Santa Cruz; and
Founder and First President of
Society for Conservation Biology
Paonia, Colorado

Mike Phillips, M.S.
Montana State Senator, and Executive Director
Turner Endangered Species Fund
Bozeman, Montana

Adrian Treves, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Environmental Studies
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Rich Reading, Ph.D.
Associate Research Professor
University of Denver
Denver, Colorado


Wisconsin changed its protocols in counting wolves, and may be over-counting them significantly. See: [http://faculty.nelson.wisc.edu/treves/](http://faculty.nelson.wisc.edu/treves/). Wisconsin admitted that 17 packs disappeared in one hunting season alone.

