

Timeline: Gray wolves and the Endangered Species Act

January 1974: Gray wolves are listed as subspecies or as regional populations of subspecies in the contiguous U.S. and Mexico on the Endangered Species Act.

May 1978: Gray wolves are reclassified as “endangered” at the taxonomic species level (*C. lupus*) throughout the contiguous U.S. and Mexico, except for the Minnesota gray wolf population, which is classified as “threatened.”

April 2003: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service publishes a final rule downlisting wolves to “threatened” in the Eastern and Western Distinct Population Segments and retaining “endangered” status for wolves in the Southwestern Distinct Population Segment. They also publish a final § 4(d) rule allowing wolves to be killed for conflicts with farm animals.

January and August 2005: Federal courts in Oregon (*Defenders of Wildlife v. Interior*), then Vermont (*Nat'l Wildlife Federation v. Norton*) vacate the April 2003 downlisting rule, reinstating “endangered” status. The courts hold that FWS downlisted vast areas without correctly applying the ESA listing factors, in violation of the ESA and the FWS’s own policy. The Vermont court also holds that the rule did not comply with the notice and comment provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act.

February 2007: The FWS issues a final rule delisting wolves in the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment.

February 2008: The FWS issues a final rule delisting wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains Distinct Population Segment.

July 2008: A federal court in Montana overturns the February 2008 Northern Rocky Mountain delisting rule (*Defenders of Wildlife v. Hall*), holding that the FWS failed to ensure adequate regulatory mechanisms in Wyoming.

September 2008: A federal court in Washington overturns the February 2007 Western Great Lakes delisting rule (*HSUS v. Kempthorne*), holding that FWS failed to explain how its decision to create a Distinct Population Segment in order to remove all ESA protections from that population comports with policy objectives of the ESA.

January 2009: The FWS publishes a final rule delisting wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains (excluding Wyoming).

April 2009: The FWS publishes a final rule delisting wolves in the Western Great Lakes.

July 2009: A federal court in Washington issues an order incorporating a settlement agreement pursuant to which the FWS must withdraw the April 2009 Western Great Lakes delisting rule (the FWS agreed that it had violated Administrative Procedure Act notice and comment requirements in issuing the April 2009 rule).

August 2010: A federal court in Montana overturns the January 2009 Northern Rocky Mountain delisting (*Defenders of Wildlife v. Salazar*), holding that the FWS cannot split a population segment into listed and delisted parts.

April 2011: Congress passes a statute directing FWS to re-delist wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain population segment (excluding Wyoming).

December 2011: The FWS again delists wolves in the Western Great Lakes.

August 2012: The FWS publishes a final rule delisting wolves in Wyoming.

June 2013: The FWS proposes removing ESA protections for gray wolves (excluding Mexican gray wolves) across the lower 48 states. The agency later abandoned the proposal because peer review raised serious doubts about basic wolf taxonomy.

September 2014: A federal court in Washington vacates the August 2012 Wyoming delisting; ESA listing restored.

December 2014: A federal court in Washington vacates the December 2011 Western Great Lakes delisting rule (*HSUS v. Jewell*), holding that Distinct Population Segment designation can only be used to increase protections; FWS was not simply revising an existing listing; FWS impermissibly failed to address historical range loss; and FWS failed to adequately consider the threats of disease, threats of human-cause mortality and the insufficiency of state regulatory measures.

March 2017: A D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling reverses the September 2014 decision, reinstating the Wyoming delisting (*Defenders of Wildlife v. Zinke*).

August 2017: The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals affirms the judgement vacating the December 2011 Western Great Lakes delisting final rule (*HSUS v. Zinke*), holding that FWS fatally failed to reasonably analyze or consider the impacts of partial delisting to the remaining portion of the species and the impacts of historical range loss.

November 2020: The FWS publishes a final rule removing federal ESA protections for gray wolves (excluding Mexican gray wolves) across the lower 48 states. The rule goes into effect on Jan. 4, 2021.

January 2021: The Humane Society of the United States and our allies file a federal lawsuit to overturn the November 2020 delisting decision.

May 2021: The HSUS, Humane Society Legislative Fund and our allies file a petition with the FWS seeking relisting of wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain population segment. The petition argues that new and extreme wolf-killing laws passed in Idaho and Montana pose a grave threat to wolves in the region, necessitating the reinstatement of federal protections—including emergency relisting.

September 2021: In response to the petition filed by the HSUS, HLSF and our allies, the FWS announces that wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains may warrant federal protection under the ESA due to Idaho and Montana's new wolf-killing laws. A status review is opened that could eventually lead to relisting of wolves in the Northern Rockies or across the Western US.

