



## Questions and Answers About the Proposal to Remove the Eastern Distinct Population Segment of the Gray Wolf from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Species

### 1) What is the Service proposing to do?

The Service is proposing to remove the Eastern Distinct Population Segment of gray wolves from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species, to remove critical habitat for the species in Minnesota and Michigan, and to remove the gray wolf 4(d) special rules which define the circumstances when gray wolves can be taken in portions of the Eastern DPS. The proposed rule to delist the gray wolf in the Eastern DPS was published in the *Federal Register*.

### 2) What is a Distinct Population Segment?

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) allows the listing and delisting of species, subspecies, and distinct population segments of vertebrate animals. A Distinct Population Segment, or DPS, is a significant population that occurs in a distinct portion of a species' or subspecies' range. The DPS is usually described geographically, such as "all members of XYZ species north of 40 degrees north latitude."

When the Service reclassified gray wolf populations in the lower 48 States in 2003, it identified three Distinct Population Segments -- the Eastern DPS, Western DPS, and Southwestern DPS -- of the gray wolf in the United States and Mexico.

Each of the DPSs encompasses a core area where wolf recovery has occurred or is underway. In the Eastern DPS this includes Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Eastern DPS also includes other states that are outside of the core recovery area but within the historical range of the gray wolf. The Eastern DPS thus includes a contiguous area from the Dakotas, Kansas and Nebraska on the west, east to the Atlantic Coast, and south to Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

### Gray Wolf Eastern Distinct Population Segment



### **3) What would happen to gray wolves in the Eastern DPS if they are delisted?**

If the Gray Wolf Eastern DPS is delisted, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would no longer oversee conservation efforts for the species in those states. Instead, State and Tribal law would dictate the level of gray wolf protection and management.

### **4) What is the status of wolves in the Eastern DPS while the Service considers the proposal? Are they still protected?**

Gray wolves in the Eastern DPS will continue to be protected under the ESA as a threatened species while the Service considers final action on the proposed rule. Critical habitat and special rules for wolf management will also remain in place until a final decision on the proposal is made.

### **5) Why is the Service proposing to delist gray wolves in the Eastern DPS?**

The goal of the ESA is to improve the population health of a listed species to the point it no longer needs the protection of the Act. Generally, this means increasing the numbers and distribution of the species, and reducing threats to its survival.

The approved recovery plan for the gray wolf in the eastern United States sets forth population criteria that, when achieved, will ensure the survival of the gray wolf into the future in the eastern United States. Those population criteria are:

- The Minnesota population is stable or growing and its continued survival is assured.
- A second population outside of Minnesota and Isle Royale (Michigan) is re-established, having at least 100 wolves in late winter if located within 100 miles of the Minnesota wolf population or having at least 200 wolves if located beyond that distance. A Wisconsin-Michigan population of 100 is considered viable because continued immigration of Minnesota wolves will supplement it.
- These population levels (outside of Minnesota) are maintained for five consecutive years (that is, for six annual wolf surveys).

Gray wolf numbers and distribution in the Eastern DPS have exceeded the population criteria identified in the recovery plan. Today's estimated population in Minnesota is more than 2,450. Wolves have become established in Wisconsin and in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and wolf numbers in those states are, respectively, 373 and 360.

In addition to exceeding population criteria set out in the recovery plan, potential threats after delisting have been addressed by Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin State management plans. To prepare for assuming management of the species after Federal delisting, each of those states developed a wolf management plan with the goal of ensuring future survival of the State's wolf population. Those plans were signed by the head of the State's Department of Natural Resources after input from wolf experts and extensive public involvement.

### **6) How do the gray wolf management plans prepared by Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin ensure the long-term survival of gray wolves in those states?**

All three State wolf management plans establish minimum wolf populations that exceed the recovery criteria of the Federal eastern recovery plan and implement management actions and protections that will maintain wolf populations above the Federal recovery criteria for the foreseeable future.

The Michigan plan calls for a minimum sustainable population of 200 wolves in the Upper Peninsula. Habitat, prey, and land-use analysis showed that the Upper Peninsula can support at least 800 wolves. No

upper population limit is specified, but an upper limit referred to as the *cultural carrying capacity* will be determined by public reaction. The plan acknowledges that in the future, “some degree of wolf population stabilization and control” may be needed and that “some wolves will likely need to be killed under controlled conditions.”

Under the Minnesota plan, wolves will be allowed to continue to naturally expand their range within the State. The minimum statewide winter population goal is 1,600 wolves; there is no maximum goal. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will take the appropriate actions to remedy the situation if the population falls below the minimum goal. The plan divides the State into wolf management zones A and B, which correspond to zones 1-4 and zone 5, respectively, in the Federal wolf recovery plan. In Zone A, where over 80 percent of the wolves reside, State protections would be nearly as strict as current protections under the ESA, and we expect little or no resulting post-delisting population decline there. The protection provided by the plan to the Zone A wolves will ensure a State wolf population well above 1,600 in that zone. In Zone B, wolves could be killed to protect domestic animals, even if attacks or threatening behavior have not occurred. While a significant decrease in the Zone B wolf population may result, such a result would be consistent with the Federal recovery plan, which discourages the establishment of a wolf population in that portion of the state.

In Wisconsin, the minimum population management goal is 350 outside of Indian Reservations. Because the wolf population now exceeds this level, the State has taken initial steps to delist the wolf and classify it as a Protected Wild Animal. If numbers decline and stay below 250 for three years, the State will relist as threatened. If they decline to less than 80 for one year, the State will relist or reclassify the wolf as endangered.

### **7) How will the Service ensure the State management plans are sufficient to protect the future survival of gray wolves in the Eastern DPS?**

Under the ESA, the Service must monitor for at least five years all species that have recovered and have been removed from the list of endangered and threatened species. If it appears, at any time, that a delisted species cannot sustain itself without the protections of the ESA, the Service can initiate the listing process, including emergency listing. The Service is preparing a post-delisting monitoring plan for the gray wolf in the Eastern DPS, and it will monitor the wolf population in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan for a minimum of five years to ensure that delisting has not occurred prematurely.

### **8) How will wolves be monitored after they are delisted?**

A post-delisting monitoring plan for the gray wolf Eastern DPS is being developed, focusing on three areas: gray wolf population dynamics, threats to the species, and mechanisms in place to reduce threats. The goal of the plan is to ensure that threats do not arise or increase unexpectedly after delisting. In the Eastern DPS, monitoring would be conducted in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, the core wolf recovery area.

Wolf populations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have been surveyed and studied for several decades, primarily by the three State natural resource departments, but with assistance from many partners, including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey – Biological Resources Division, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services, Tribal natural resource agencies, and the Service. All three states intend to continue their previous wolf population monitoring practices with only minor changes. Minnesota, for example, is currently completing a statewide survey of its wolf population and expects to have a population estimate later in 2004. It plans to complete this survey again five years after Federal delisting.

In addition to monitoring population numbers and trends, the monitoring plan will include evaluating threats, in particular disease and human-caused mortality, and any legal or management measures imposed by States or Tribes.

If at any time during the monitoring period the Service detects a significant decline in the populations or a new or expanded threat, it will evaluate and change the monitoring methods, if appropriate, and consider relisting the Eastern DPS. At the end of the monitoring period, the Service will decide if relisting, continued monitoring, or ending Service monitoring is appropriate. If warranted (for example, data show a significant decline or increased threats), the Service will consider continuing monitoring beyond the specified time.

**9) Does this proposal affect wolves outside the Eastern DPS?**

No. Gray wolves in the Western DPS and the Southwestern DPS, and red wolves (a separate species found in the Southeast), would not be affected by this proposed action. Gray wolves in the Western DPS remain threatened; gray wolves in the Southwestern DPS and red wolves remain endangered.

**10) If gray wolves in the Eastern DPS are delisted, can they be hunted and trapped?**

Once gray wolves in the Eastern DPS are removed from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species, their management will be the responsibility of States with wolf populations and of Tribes whose tribal lands support wolves. Each State or Tribe must decide whether activities such as hunting and trapping will be allowed, and whether they will affect the prospects of the gray wolf's long-term survival. For example, Minnesota will not consider public hunting and trapping, except for depredation control, until at least five years after Federal delisting. In Wisconsin, public harvest would only be considered if the population exceeds 350 wolves outside of Native American reservations and would require authorization by the Legislature following major public input. The Michigan management plan acknowledges that the wolf population may need to be controlled by lethal means when the "cultural carrying capacity" is reached or approached.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not prescribe the specifics of how States and Tribes manage wolves, but that they implement plans that effectively conserve the gray wolves in their states so Federal relisting as threatened or endangered will not be necessary.

**11) How can the Service delist the gray wolf in the Northeast if there are no wolves there?**

Each gray wolf DPS includes one or more core wolf recovery area along with surrounding States within the historical range of the gray wolf. Thus, the three gray wolf DPSs include all areas in the 48 States and Mexico where gray wolves once occurred. The approved eastern gray wolf recovery plan calls for restoration of the wolf to a point that it no longer needs protection of the ESA. The ESA directs the Service to take actions that are needed to avoid the extinction of a species; the ESA does not require, nor does the recovery plan call for, the restoration of species across its historical range. The recovery plan for wolves in the Eastern DPS specifies that they must be recovered in Minnesota and in one other place in their historical range in the East. This second population now exists in Wisconsin and Michigan. The Wisconsin and Michigan population's size and distribution will ensure that the gray wolf continues to survive in the eastern United States, even though it does not occupy its entire former range.

**12) Does delisting in the Northeast mean that there would be no possibility for future reintroduction or recovery efforts there?**

Several private conservation organizations are investigating the biological potential and societal acceptance of restoring wolves to New York and Maine. However, after Federal delisting, northeastern reintroductions would have to be done under legal authorities other than the Endangered Species Act.

While the northeastern United States may contain a large area of historical range not currently occupied by breeding wolves, recovery of the Eastern DPS is not contingent on wolves being found in this area. Assuming that the population in its current range is recovered, it is appropriate to delist the Eastern DPS even if a substantial amount of the historical range remains unoccupied. Although the Service does not believe that additional wolf restoration is necessary within the northeastern United States before delisting the Eastern DPS, delisting will not preclude States and Tribes from undertaking additional wolf restoration programs if they are interested.

**13) Aren't there questions among wolf experts about the species of wolf that once inhabited the Northeast? Won't that affect the Service's proposal to delist gray wolves there?**

There are several opinions as to the species or subspecies of the wolf that once inhabited the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, and that debate continues. Based on genetics, skull measurements, and other data, some taxonomists think that the historical species in the Northeast was a red wolf, while others believe that it is a subspecies of gray wolf. Due to the extreme uncertainty over wolf taxonomy, at this time we are adopting no final position on the identity of the wolf (or wolves) that historically existed in the northeastern United States.

The Service does not believe that additional gray wolf restoration is necessary within the northeastern U.S. before delisting the Eastern DPS.

**14) When will the Service make a final decision on this proposal?**

In general, the Service has a year from the date a proposal is made to finalize the proposed action. During that time, the Service solicits public input, often holds public hearings, evaluates comments and other information gathered during the public comment period, and makes a decision on the proposal. The Service can approve the proposal, withdraw it, or approve it in amended form based on information gathered during the comment period.

**15) How can the public provide input on the proposal?**

The Service is accepting comments on the proposal [for 120 days after the proposed rule is published](#). You may comment by sending an e-mail to [egwdelist@fs.fed.us](mailto:egwdelist@fs.fed.us).

or by sending a letter to:

Gray Wolf Delist – Eastern Distinct Population Segment  
c/o Content Analysis Team  
P.O. Box 221150  
Salt Lake City, UT 84122-1150

or by sending a fax to (801)517-1015

or by following the instruction on the Federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>.

In addition, a series of public hearings will be held where oral and written comments will be accepted. Check the Service's Midwest website at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf> for dates and locations of the public hearings. In the event that our internet connection is not functional, please submit your comments by mail or fax.

**16) Where can I get more information?**

The *Federal Register* publication of the proposed delisting of the gray wolf Eastern DPS, as well as information about gray wolf populations, is available on the Internet at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf>.

Individuals or groups wishing to be placed on the Service's mailing list to obtain updates on the wolf's status can write to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Gray Wolf Review  
1 Federal Drive  
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

or use the GRAYWOLFMAIL@FWS.GOV address or call the Service's Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337.

In the event that the Service's internet connection is not functional, please contact the Service by mail or telephone.