

Feds file to delist wolves, except in Wyoming

April 1 2009, By BEN NEARY , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a formal rule Wednesday to remove gray wolves from the federal endangered list in Montana and Idaho while keeping protections in Wyoming.

That state and environmentalists promised to challenge immediately when the formal delisting rule is published Thursday in the Federal Register. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar had said last month that he would uphold the agency's decision to continue managing [wolves](#) in Wyoming.

State Attorney General Bruce Salzburg said Wyoming will sue over being denied management of wolves. The state has proposed classifying wolves as predators that could be shot on sight in most of the state or that they be managed as trophy game in some parts.

The Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental groups said they would sue over their contention that federal protections are inadequate.

Doug Honnold, a lawyer with Earthjustice in Montana - the law firm representing conservation groups - said they were "going to fight until we can get to legitimate recovery. We think that the population is close to appropriate recovery levels, but it's not there yet."

Ed Bangs, wolf recovery coordinator with the U.S. Fish and [Wildlife Service](#) in Montana, said the agency expected the legal challenges.

"We know we're going to be in litigation over this whole thing," he said.

Salzburg said Wednesday that Wyoming objected to the federal agency's request to raise the number of wolves the state should accommodate. He said the agency has said for years that Wyoming, Montana and Idaho needed to maintain 15 breeding pairs and at least 150 wolves each. The rule released this week specifies that Wyoming also should maintain at least seven breeding pairs and 70 wolves outside of Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service needs to make its decisions based solely on science, as opposed to what we think are political and public relations concerns that in our view don't have a place in a listing or delisting decision," Salzburg said.

The federal agency in late 2007 accepted Wyoming's management plan but environmentalists sued over the delisting. A federal judge later ruled in favor of the environmental groups, saying the state plans were insufficient to protect the wolves.

The agency also filed a separate rule Wednesday calling for removing federal protections for wolves in the western Great Lakes.

Bangs said about 1,645 wolves live in the northern Rockies, including more than 300 in Wyoming, nearly 500 in Montana and about 850 in Idaho.

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