

# Montana governor says wolf deal dead

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(AP) -- Negotiations to remove Northern Rockies gray wolves from the endangered species list hit an impasse Monday, after Wyoming and Idaho refused to go along with an Interior Department proposal on the issue, Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer said.

Schweitzer said the breakdown in talks between the three states and the Obama administration makes it unlikely Congress will address the issue this year.

Western lawmakers have introduced multiple bills to strip protections from an estimated 1,700 wolves in the Northern Rockies, where the animals' attacks on livestock and big game herds have stoked growing resentment.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has previously approved plans to hunt the predators in Idaho and Montana - but not Wyoming. That's because Wyoming law classifies wolves as predators that can be shot onsite across most of the state.

Schweitzer said the administration was ready to back legislation to take wolves off the list in Montana and Idaho, while giving Wyoming three years to craft an acceptable management plan for the predators.

"I was ready to go forward with a hunt in January of 170-something wolves," he said. "But the governors, we couldn't come to a consensus with the secretary of Interior about a possible legislative fix."

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal would not confirm Schweitzer's description of a Monday conference call between the three governors and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

"That's Brian's perspective," he said.

Earlier Monday, Interior Department spokeswoman Kendra Barkoff said talks between the states and administration were continuing, but she did not elaborate. A spokesman for Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter did not return a call late Monday seeking comment.

[Wolves](#) lost their endangered status in Montana and Idaho in 2009, but were returned to the endangered list this year following a lawsuit from environmentalists.

U.S. District Judge Donald Molly ruled in August that it was illegal to declare the animal recovered from near-extinction across a part of its range while it remained at risk in Wyoming.

Another federal judge, in Wyoming, later said the government's rejection of Wyoming's management plan was unfounded. That ruling stopped short of ordering the animals off the endangered list.

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