

# Wyoming, feds announce plan for delisting wolves

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(AP) -- Wyoming and the U.S. Department of Interior have reached an agreement over how to end federal protections for wolves in the state, officials announced Wednesday.

Gov. Matt Mead hailed the agreement, saying wolves have taken a heavy toll on livestock and wildlife in the state. Wyoming is the last state in the Northern Rockies that still has federal oversight of its [wolf](#) population.

"This is far from the end of this process," Mead said. "But I think we have come up with something that fits with Wyoming's values and economy."

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has traveled to Wyoming repeatedly in recent months to work on the agreement.

"The recovery of the [gray wolf](#) serves as a great example of how the [Endangered Species Act](#) can work to keep imperiled animals from sliding into extinction," Salazar said Wednesday. "The agreement we've reached with Wyoming recognizes the success of this iconic species and will ensure the long-term conservation of gray wolves."

Under the agreement, Wyoming is committing to maintain at least 10 breeding pairs and 100 wolves outside [Yellowstone National Park](#). There are now about 340 wolves in the state, of which 230 are outside the park.

Wolves immediately outside Yellowstone would be subject to regulated

hunting in a zone that would expand slightly in the winter months to give wolves more protection. Those in the rest of the state would be classified as predators that could be shot on sight.

Steve Ferrell, Mead's policy adviser on endangered species, said Wednesday the state hopes Congress will act to specify that any final delisting plan will be exempt from legal challenges. Congress approved similar language earlier this year for delisting wolves in other western states.

Ferrell said the federal government plans to propose a draft delisting rule by Oct. 1. He said it could take a year for the final rule to be approved to allow Wyoming to take over wolf management.

The Wyoming Legislature will consider changes to the state's current wolf management plan when it meets early next year.

Environmental groups have been critical of the Wyoming plan as details have emerged in recent months. Some groups are mounting a legal challenge in federal court in Montana to the congressional language that exempted wolf delisting from legal review.

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