

Wisconsin's Green Fire Statement on February 10th, 2022 Federal Re-listing of Wolves

On February 10, 2022, Federal Judge Jeffery S. White of the Northern District of California ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's November 2020 rule that de-listed wolves from protection under the Endangered Species Act was "vacated and remanded". A primary rationale for the ruling was the court's finding that the 2020 de-listing order did not adequately consider threats to wolves throughout their historic range outside of the Great Lakes and Northern Rocky Mountains where viable populations of wolves currently occur.

As the defendant in the case, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has not indicated whether the agency intends to appeal the ruling, or whether or when the agency might initiate a revised de-listing order.

The current reversal on de-listing is the 5th time since 2007 that gray wolves have been re-listed as federally endangered in Wisconsin.

The re-listing of wolves has numerous consequences in Wisconsin and surrounding states:

- In Wisconsin, Michigan, and most other states outside the Rocky Mountains, gray wolves are again a federally endangered species. Wolves in Minnesota are returned to a threatened status.
- Gray wolves in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming and portions of surrounding states remain de-listed because they were removed from Endangered Species listing by earlier acts of Congress.
- No public hunting and trapping of wolves is allowed while they are listed as an Endangered Species.
- In Wisconsin, all forms of lethal controls by government agencies (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and USDA-Wildlife Services) will be prohibited, except in cases of imminent human safety threats.
- Landowners no longer have authority to shoot wolves attacking domestic animals, and landowners will not be allowed permits to shoot problem wolves on their own land.
- All depredation management work carried out by WDNR, USDA-Wildlife Services, or by private landowners will be limited to nonlethal methods only, unless a human safety threat is involved.

Despite the most recent ruling that re-lists wolves, recent history has shown clearly that wolves' legal status can change again anytime. We cannot afford to be unprepared for the next change.

Wisconsin has the opportunity to lead once again by continuing to promote scientifically sound wolf conservation. Wisconsin's Green Fire supports the following actions:

- **WDNR should continue work without delay to complete the development of an updated wolf conservation plan for Wisconsin.** Much of the work for this plan is already complete. The plan should reflect updated wolf population estimates, goals that reflect an ecologically functional and robust population, and regulatory methods for assuring management of viable populations of wolves within their core habitats. The plan must help assure that tribal rights and interests are fully respected and that all management approaches contribute to minimizing human wolf conflicts using science-tested approaches.
- **New legislation is needed to restore authority and responsibility to WDNR for managing wolves,** consistent with our long-standing and successful model for wildlife management with robust public participation and science-based management tools. The provision of Wisconsin Act 169 mandating a wolf hunt any time wolves are not listed as an Endangered Species should be rescinded.
- **WDNR should continue developing a permanent rule for wolf management in Wisconsin.** Rulemaking should address all aspects of wolf conservation and management, including provisions for management of wolves under all legal scenarios.
- **Specifically, a new wolf rule must develop a management structure that addresses the multiple failures of process and outcomes that occurred during the February 2021 wolf hunt.** When and if public hunting of wolves does occur, the hunting season structure must:
 - Assure that any hunting quotas are based on science-based population estimates and a goal of maintaining robust populations and ecological function.
 - Assure that the number of licenses issued, and registration and season closure requirements can be used effectively to limit hunting pressure to within quota limits.
 - Ensure that any hunting activity is focused on locations and using methods with the greatest potential to reduce human wolf conflicts and avoids harvest methods such as use of hounds that lack public support and are difficult to regulate.
 - Ensure that wolf populations around Wisconsin Indian reservations are protected with adequate buffers closed to wolf hunting.
 - Avoid harvests during sensitive periods such as the breeding and pup rearing season.