

Greens seek federal oversight of wolves in Idaho, Mont.

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GREENWIRE | Two conservation groups asked the Biden administration to reinstate a federal monitoring program to oversee the management of gray wolves in Idaho and Montana following changes in wolf hunting laws in the two states intended to drastically reduce wolf numbers.

The Idaho Conservation League and the Endangered Species Coalition also yesterday urged federal officials to do a status review that could lead to relisting wolves under the Endangered Species Act.

Both states' management of wolves was under federal oversight for five years after wolves were delisted about a decade ago. The groups said that oversight needs to be reinstated "because the previous five-year monitoring period has been demonstrated to be inadequate for ensuring long-term state commitments to a recovered gray wolf population."

The groups in the [letter](#), sent to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and Fish and Wildlife Service Principal Deputy Director Martha Williams, want federal oversight of Idaho and Montana wolf management plans for at least 10 years.

As for the status review to relist wolves, the groups said the changes in wolf hunting laws pose such a serious threat to wolf populations that they trigger a status review requirement as outlined in a 2009 Fish and Wildlife Service document involving the states' responsibilities in wolf management.

"These legislative changes constitute a stark departure from the states' wolf management plans that the USFWS approved more than a decade ago," the groups wrote in the petition.

FWS is supposed to respond within 90 days.

That 2009 document outlines three scenarios that could lead FWS to initiate a status review. One of them is "if a change in state law or management objectives would significantly increase the threat to the wolf population."

The other two scenarios involve population numbers. The first is if either state, plus Wyoming, see wolf populations fall below 10 breeding pairs or 100 wolves at the end of the year.

The second is if any of those three states see wolf populations fall below 15 breeding pairs or 150 wolves for three consecutive years.

In May, Idaho Republican Gov. Brad Little signed a measure lawmakers said could lead to killing 90 percent of the state's 1,500 wolves through expanded trapping and hunting. It took effect July 1.

Lawmakers pushing the measure, backed by trappers and the powerful ranching sector but heavily criticized by environmental advocates, stated explicitly during debates in a Senate committee and on the Senate floor that the state can cut the number of wolves to 150 before federal authorities would take over management.

They said reducing the wolf population would reduce attacks on livestock and boost deer and elk herds.

A primary change in wolf hunting in Idaho allows the state to hire private contractors to kill wolves and provides more money for state officials to hire the contractors. The law also expands killing methods to include trapping and snaring wolves on a single hunting tag, using night-vision equipment, chasing wolves on snowmobiles and ATVs, and shooting them from helicopters. It also authorizes year-round wolf trapping on private property.

In Montana, state wildlife authorities earlier this month approved a statewide harvest quota of 450 wolves, about 40 percent of the state's wolf population. Methods for killing wolves that were previously outlawed can now be used. Those include snaring, baiting and night hunting. Trapping seasons have also been expanded.



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