

INTERIOR

New wolf-killing laws prompt push to revive protections

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Wolves in across Northern Rockies lost federal endangered protections in 2011 under an act of Congress after the species had rebounded from widespread extermination last century. National Park Service

Wildlife advocates pressed the Biden administration today to revive federal protections for gray wolves across the Northern Rockies after Republican lawmakers in Idaho and Montana made it much easier to kill the predators.

The Center for Biological Diversity, Humane Society of the United States and Sierra Club filed a [petition](#) asking Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to use her emergency authority to return thousands of wolves in the region to the endangered species list.

Republican state lawmakers pushed through legislation in recent weeks that would allow hunters and trappers to kill unlimited numbers of wolves using aggressive tactics such as shooting them from all-terrain vehicles and helicopters, using night-vision scopes and setting lethal snares that some consider inhumane.

Wolves in the region lost federal endangered protections in 2011 under an act of Congress after the species had rebounded from widespread extermination last century.

Hundreds of wolves are now killed annually by hunters and trappers. Yet their population has remained strong because the animals breed so successfully and can roam huge areas of wild land in the sparsely populated Northern Rockies.

Backers of restoring protections say the new laws will tip the scales and drive down wolf numbers to unsustainable levels, while also threatening packs in Wyoming and other nearby states that have interconnected populations.

They argue that the states have violated the terms that allowed state management of wolves and want Haaland to act before the looser rules start going into effect in Idaho on July 1.

"The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife] Service was very clear that a change in state law that allowed for unregulated, unlimited take of wolves would set off the alarm," said attorney Nicholas Arrivo with the Humane Society. "This is essentially an attempt to push the population down to the very minimum."

Today's petition steps up pressure on the administration over wolf populations that were declared recovered when President Biden was serving as vice president under former President Obama. Biden also inherited a legal fight in the Midwest over the Trump administration's removal of protections for wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

In both regions, hunting groups and livestock producers successfully lobbied for more permissive hunting regulations to counter persistent wolf attacks on livestock and big game animals.

Idaho lawmakers who sponsored a law signed earlier this month by Republican Gov. Brad Little said they wanted to reduce the state's 1,500 wolves to the allowed minimum of 150 to protect livestock and boost deer and elk herds.

In Montana, Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte — who received a warning this year for trapping a wolf without taking a required certification class in violation of state rules — signed a law last month requiring wolf numbers to be reduced, although not below 15 breeding pairs of the animals ([Greenwire](#), March 24).

"It wasn't to reduce them to zero, it was to reduce them to a sustainable level," said Greg Lemon with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. "We've got the track record and the statutory framework to ensure they are managed to that sustainable level."

The Fish and Wildlife Service has long contended it's not necessary for wolves to be in every place they once inhabited to be considered recovered. The agency did not immediately respond to questions about today's petition. — *Matthew Brown, Associated Press*

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