

Nate Helm: The management of wolves belongs with local interests

About 1,500 wolves roam the Northern Rockies today, and the population grows by 24 percent each year. That's why federal officials at the end of March will remove wolves from federal endangered species protection, which will allow Idaho to

BY NATE HELM - Idaho Statesman

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Yes, it is time - time to remove the population of wolves living in Idaho from the endangered species list. Sportsmen in Idaho and across the West support the Department of Interior's (DOI) recent proposal to delist wolves in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Wolves in Idaho are currently managed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In the case of wolves, the constitutional right given to all states, including Idaho, to manage her wildlife has been superseded by the ESA. The traditional managers of wildlife in Idaho - the citizens of the state, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game - have had little say.

It is a tough pill to swallow but even many of those who fought this mandated wolf proliferation in Idaho recognize that a managed population based on the federally approved state plan can work into the future. Idaho's plan was easily approved because scientists, policy makers, and the thinking public could see that it provided adequate protection for wolves. It also allowed Idaho to again manage her wildlife and make decisions based on constitutional authorization and her citizens' wishes.

It is ironic to me that in the face of reality, today's wolf "advocates" continue to seek to prevent wolf delisting in Idaho. They do this by suggesting in their communications that delisting as proposed will take wolves to the brink of extinction. It is further confounding to remember that these same organizations championed initial proposals that would merely establish new, basic population in the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. You may remember the presentation shaped to suggest that they were only asking for a few packs in a few states (30 total). Today these organizations prepare to file suit while populations are more than five times larger than the proposed reintroduction plan's minimums, and total wolf populations exceed 1,500. All the while, Idaho's approved management plan's base population numbers exceed the original proposals and allow science-based buffers.

Knowing this - ask yourself a simple question. Will Idaho (sportsmen) ever be able to satisfy the organizations attempting to prevent delisting?

By contrast, sportsmen have shown they are willing to sacrifice some of their primary interests for the long-term values held by a portion of North American society. Sportsmen are now bearing the loss of opportunity and witnessing the spread of economic hardship.

Outfitters are the easiest example demonstrating the negative economic impact to Idaho businesses. Ask your neighbor or talk to your friend in the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to hear a similar story of dissatisfaction that has led to reduced participation. Follow the dollars. This is why I find it disingenuous at the very least that those threatening suit have personally given little in proportion to that given by the Idaho citizen. It puts Idaho and her sportsmen in a position where once again they must spend their resources to defend their right to manage their own wildlife.

Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife - Idaho, together with her sister organizations throughout the West, are committed to defending our rights with our time and resources. In preparation for this effort, the SFW states in the West are pooling resources to ensure our voice is heard (go to www.sfwsfh.org for more information).

Wolf advocates have generated millions and millions of dollars with their efforts to garner support by spinning a false message that attempts to humanize wildlife. I suggest that today is the day to rally to the cause to prevent the sue-happy wolf advocates from further attempts at grabbing wildlife management power from Idaho citizens using their baseless diatribe to raise money. Now is the time for Western sportsmen to unite in demanding change. It is time to remove wolves in Idaho from the list of endangered species and return wildlife management to our states. Together we can win this fight.

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