

REVOKING GRAY WOLF ESA PROTECTIONS

Passed: 209-205

SUMMARY:

The House passed a bill to delist the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act, which would revoke federal protections for the species and undermine the scientific integrity of the ESA (*April 30, 2024, Roll Call No. 169*).

BACKGROUND:

The gray wolf is an iconic keystone species that plays a vital role in keeping our native ecosystems healthy. Unfortunately, gray wolf populations in the United States were decimated by decades of predator control programs, as well as loss of habitat and prey. Since receiving protection under the ESA in 1974, the gray wolf has begun a comeback but remains far from recovered.

In February 2023, Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.) introduced H.R. 764, or the “Trust the Science” Act, which sought to reinstate a hastily issued rule by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the end of the Trump administration to delist gray wolves in 44 states (85 Fed. Reg 69778). Delisting would strip all federal protections for gray wolves and thus jeopardize the progress made to recover the species across its historic range in the lower 48. The rule was challenged by conservation organizations and vacated by a federal district court in February 2022. The court found that the delisting decision improperly relied on two core populations to delist wolves nationally, failed to provide a reasonable interpretation of what constitutes a “significant” portion of the species’ range, ignored the fact that the ancestry of West Coast wolves was distinct from northern Rockies wolves, and did not consider the impact of lost historic range on gray wolves.

By forcing the reinstatement of the Trump administration’s scientifically indefensible delisting rule, the ironically named “Trust the Science Act” undermines the integrity of the ESA by allowing for management decisions to be based on politics over science. The intent of the bill to shield the FWS’s flawed scientific reasoning from inquiry is made even clearer by the bill’s preclusion of judicial review, undermining the rule of law that holds government officials accountable in the courts.

OUTCOME:

On April 30, 2024, the House passed H.R. 764, the Trust the Science Act, 209-205. “No” was the pro-conservation vote.