



WOLVES IN THE NORTHERN ROCKIES



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“The return of the gray wolf is a true American success story. It shows that conserving our native wildlife isn’t an abstract idea. By working together, we can actually make it happen.”

—JAMIE RAPPAPORT CLARK
Executive Vice President
Defenders of Wildlife

DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE is a recognized leader in wolf conservation with a long history, an excellent track record and a substantial investment in restoring these misunderstood predators to their rightful place in the Rockies and elsewhere.

Defenders was the first wildlife organization to call for the return of gray wolves to Yellowstone National Park. We were also the first to develop a compensation program for reimbursing ranchers for livestock lost to wolves in the region. And we were there to help with the release of wild gray wolves in Yellowstone and central Idaho in the mid-1990s, making wolf restoration in the American West a reality.

Today, more than 1,650 wolves live in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and parts of Washington and Oregon where dispersing wolves have formed new packs. Defenders is still on the scene, fighting for this population that the federal government—ignoring science, our nation’s commitment to protecting imperiled wildlife and pressure from conservationists—recently removed from the endangered species list. Now that Northern Rockies wolves no longer have federal protections (except in Wyoming), we are working harder than ever to ensure that the states manage wolves responsibly. Only with sound science guiding all decisions and ongoing efforts to increase tolerance and reduce conflicts between wolves and livestock will a healthy population of wolves continue to thrive throughout the region.

Wolves Bring Benefits to Region

Researchers in Yellowstone National Park have documented significant benefits they attribute to the return of wolves:

RESTORED BIODIVERSITY. Elk, an important prey species for wolves, now seldom linger exclusively in open meadows and wetlands where wolves hunt. As a result, important native plants like willow and aspen are recovering from years of over-browsing and are once again providing habitat for resident birds, fish, beaver and other creatures.

HEALTHIER ELK, DEER AND MOOSE POPULATIONS. Wolves cull old, sick and weak individuals from herds. Overall elk populations in the region remain above state management targets as the balance between predator and prey is restored.

ECONOMIC BOOST FROM INCREASED TOURISM. Wolves have cultural, aesthetic and recreational value that translates into \$35 million annually in tourism revenue in the greater Yellowstone region.

DECADES OF DEDICATION TO WOLF CONSERVATION

THE NORTHERN ROCKIES were once a stronghold for gray wolves, but control programs initiated in the 1880s essentially wiped out the species there by the 1930s. Government agents killed Yellowstone National Park's last wolves in 1926, just 12 years after the launch of a federal campaign to rid the West's public lands of wolves and other predators for the benefit of livestock owners. Forty years later, Defenders became the first national conservation group to call for wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone, promoting the idea in a 1967 *Defenders Magazine* article.

When the Endangered Species Act became law in 1973, wolves were one of the first species listed, and the road to recovery opened at last. In the decades since, Defenders has made the wolf a top priority and secured a reputation as a key leader in wolf conservation.

1980-1989: Education and Vision

- Began working for wolf reintroduction in earnest when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a draft wolf recovery plan for wolves in the Rocky Mountain region that did not include reintroduction to Yellowstone National Park.
- Brought "Wolves and Humans," an acclaimed Science Museum of Minnesota exhibit, to Yellowstone National Park and Boise, Idaho, to educate citizens and build support for wolf restoration.
- Sponsored an international wolf symposium in Washington, D.C., and set up a summertime wolf education program in Yellowstone National Park that collected 68,000 signatures in favor of wolf reintroduction to Yellowstone.
- Introduced a program to compensate ranchers in northern Montana for verified livestock losses to wolves in response to the birth of a litter of wolf pups—the first documented in the Rockies in half a century—near Glacier National Park.

Wolf population growth: from 0 to 12 wolves

1990-1999: Reintroduction and Reestablishment

- Started working with Congress to garner support for the plan to restore wolves to the Northern Rockies by releasing wild wolves from Canada in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho.
- Expanded the wolf compensation program to the entire Northern Rockies region to increase tolerance for the restoration of wolves.
- Assisted with the release of wild gray wolves in Yellowstone and central Idaho in 1995 and contributed staff and funding for the second release of wolves in 1996.
- Offered rewards for information leading to the conviction of poachers illegally killing newly restored wolves.
- Developed and promoted nonlethal methods and tools to reduce livestock losses to wolves and shared implementation costs with ranchers.

Wolf population growth: from 12 to 337 wolves



2000-2010: Recovery and Uncertainty

- Won a federal appeals court decision overturning a lower court’s 1997 ruling in a lawsuit brought by the American Farm Bureau that the reintroductions were illegal and all wolves and their offspring should be removed from Yellowstone.
- Created the Livestock Producer Advisory Council to involve cattle and sheep growers in proactive carnivore conservation.
- Co-founded the Western Wolf Coalition, a group of 20 local, state, regional and national wildlife organizations working together to increase public support for science-based wolf conservation.
- Turned the management of the livestock compensation program in Montana over to state officials and contributed \$100,000 in supporting funds.
- Published *Livestock and Wolves: A Guide to Nonlethal Tools and Methods to Reduce Conflicts*, a booklet now used by thousands of ranchers and wolf managers in the United States and abroad.

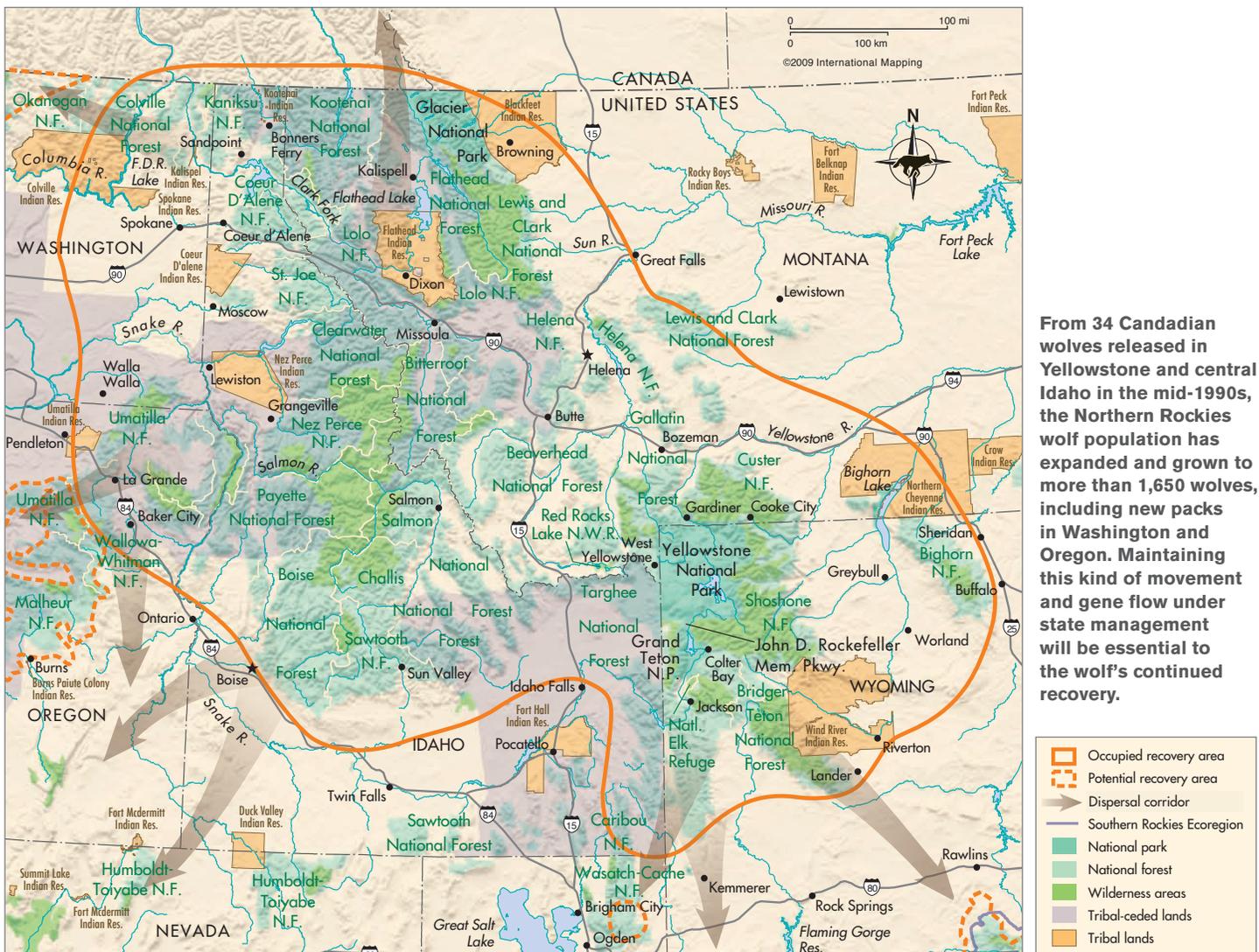
- Won a lawsuit in federal district court reversing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision to remove wolves from the endangered species list.
- Fought multiple congressional attacks on wolf protections, defeating the most extreme proposals to exempt wolves across the country from the Endangered Species Act.

Wolf population growth: from 337 to more than 1,650 wolves, including new packs in Oregon and Washington

2011: Delisting

- Renewed our commitment and adjusted our strategy as Congress stripped federal protections for wolves in the Northern Rockies, except in Wyoming, as part of a must-pass budget bill, and the U.S. Department of the Interior officially delisted wolves in Idaho and Montana and parts of Washington, Oregon and Utah—despite the best efforts of Defenders and many others.

Northern Rockies Wolf Recovery Areas and Dispersal Corridors



From 34 Canadian wolves released in Yellowstone and central Idaho in the mid-1990s, the Northern Rockies wolf population has expanded and grown to more than 1,650 wolves, including new packs in Washington and Oregon. Maintaining this kind of movement and gene flow under state management will be essential to the wolf’s continued recovery.

A STRATEGY FOR MOVING FORWARD

DEFENDERS' OVERARCHING GOAL of ensuring healthy, sustainable wolf populations across the Northern Rockies is all the more challenging now that Congress has stripped the region's wolves of federal protections and the U.S. Department of the Interior has turned wolf management over to the states (except Wyoming, which has yet to develop an approved management plan). Defenders' strategy moving forward focuses on five objectives.

1. Ensure that sound science guides all decisions about wolves.

When it comes to protecting America's wildlife and natural heritage, politics should never trump science as it did in the recent legislative removal of Endangered Species Act protections for Northern Rockies wolves. Thus, restoring science as the basis for all wolf management decisions is a top Defenders priority. Toward that end, we are working with the states and other stakeholders to make sure the best available science guides all management decisions. This includes relying on the latest research and scientific expertise to:

- Maintain a healthy, viable population and ensure sufficient genetic exchange within the region.
- Implement robust wolf population monitoring from year to year.
- Determine the true impacts that wolves have on game species such as deer and elk.

We are also pushing to convene a scientific panel of experts to review state wolf management objectives.

2. Reduce conflicts between wolves and livestock.

Defenders is a pioneer in finding ways for people, livestock and wildlife to coexist. Through our Wolf Coexistence Partnership we have collaborated with Northern Rockies ranchers to develop and implement nonlethal deterrents and other techniques for minimizing conflict between wolves and livestock, investing more than \$330,000 in nearly 100 projects to date.

We are continuing to promote coexistence throughout the region and to work proactively with farmers and ranchers, especially in areas where conflict is most likely to arise. We have already increased our efforts in Idaho and Montana and expanded into Oregon and Washington, where wolves are just starting to settle.

3. Build local support for wolves.

To counter anti-wolf rhetoric, undocumented claims and other misinformation, Defenders is redoubling efforts to communicate the benefits of wolf conservation to all residents of the region. Assisted by our conservation allies in the Western Wolf Coalition, we are cultivating and expanding our base of regional supporters,



Sheep file past fladry, rope strung with red or orange flags that is used as a barrier to keep wolves out of an area. Defenders helps ranchers purchase and install this inexpensive, portable, nonlethal wolf deterrent.

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including the ranching and hunting communities that see the real value in restoring balance to the landscape and keeping wildness in the West. We are also helping to amplify the voices of wildlife enthusiasts, religious organizations, tribal groups, small businesses and others who support wolf conservation.

4. Hold state agencies accountable for managing wolves responsibly.

State wildlife managers have a responsibility to adhere to the scientific principles of wildlife conservation and maintain healthy wolf populations. Defenders is holding them to it by closely monitoring their actions and those of state wildlife commissions and legislatures. We are promoting positive state efforts that support continued wolf recovery and opposing management decisions that would put wolves in jeopardy.

5. Advocate for the reform of Wildlife Services, the federal agency that handles wolf control.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services has taken a heavy-handed approach to wolf control in the Rockies, killing wolves rather than promoting tolerance and nonlethal deterrents. We are calling for the agency to learn effective deterrent techniques, help livestock owners implement them where needed and make killing wolves the last resort—not the default first choice.

To learn more about Defenders' efforts to protect and restore wolves in the Northern Rockies, visit www.defenders.org.



MONTANA OFFICE
303 West Mendenhall, Suite 3
Bozeman, Montana 59715
406.586.3970

IDAHO OFFICE
P.O.Box 773
Boise, Idaho 83701
208.424.9385

HEADQUARTERS
1130 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202.682.9400