

# Coalition seeks relisting of gray wolves in U.S. West

By KEITH RIDLER  
The Associated Press



Jacob W. Frank/National Park Service, File

**This Nov. 7, 2017, photo provided by the National Park Service shows a wolf in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. Wildlife advocates on Thursday, July 29, 2021, petitioned federal officials to restore federal protections for gray wolves throughout the U.S. West after Idaho and Montana passed laws intended to drastically cut their numbers.**

BOISE — Wildlife advocates on Thursday, July 29, petitioned federal officials to restore federal protections for gray wolves throughout the U.S. West after Idaho and Montana passed laws intended to drastically cut their numbers.

Western Watersheds Project, WildEarth Guardians and others sent the petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The agency is supposed to respond within 90 days on whether there is enough information for a potential listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The groups cite unregulated hunting, poaching and genetic problems involving small wolf populations.

“Wolves remain completely absent from suitable habitats or perilously close to extinction in many western states, and the handful of states surrounding Yellowstone National Park are now driving the larger populations toward extinction — endangered species listing — by ramping up wolf

killing and stripping away hunting and trapping regulations in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming,” said Erik Molvar, executive director of Western Watersheds Project.

In May, Idaho Republican Gov. Brad Little signed

a measure lawmakers said could lead to killing 90% 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, often said the state can cut the number of wolves to 150 before federal authorities would take over management. They said reducing

the population would reduce attacks on livestock and boost deer and elk herds.

A primary change in the new law 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.

The state Department of Fish and Game reported in February that the wolf population has held at about 1,500 the past two years. The numbers were derived in part by using remote cameras.

About 500 wolves have been killed in the state in each of the last two years by hunters, trappers and state and federal authorities carrying out wolf control measures.

Wildlife authorities in Montana, following new laws, have been looking at changes such as increasing

the number of wolves an individual can hunt to between five and 10. A decision is expected in August.

Authorities said this year they expect the state’s wolf population to decrease from around 1,150 to between 900 and 950 following a particularly successful hunting season. Over 320 wolves were harvested during the 2020 hunting season — significantly more than the preceding eight-year average of 242 wolves per year, according to a report released by the department in June.

The petition seeks to protect wolves in those two states as well as Wyoming, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, California, Nevada and northern Arizona. The petition said those states are part of the range of wolves.

“These wolves are at risk of extinction throughout all of their range, and unquestionably are at risk of immediate extinction in significant portions of their range,” the 63-page petition states.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

# Good progress being made in battle against U.S. wildfires

The Associated Press

BLY — Firefighters in Oregon reported good progress in the battle against the nation’s largest wildfire, while authorities canceled evacuation orders near a major blaze in Northern California and another on Hawaii’s Big Island.

Containment of the Bootleg Fire in remote Southern Oregon was up to 84% late Sunday, Aug. 1. It was 56% contained a day earlier.

“That reflects several good days of work on the ground where crews have been able to reinforce and build additional containment lines,” fire

spokesperson Al Nash said.

The blaze has scorched more than 646 square miles since being sparked by lightning July 6 in the Fremont-Winema National Forest.

California’s Dixie Fire covered nearly 388 square miles in mountains where 42 homes and other buildings have been destroyed.

The fire was 33% contained Aug. 1, and evacuation orders and warnings had earlier been lifted for several areas of Butte and Plumas counties.

The cause of the blaze was still under investigation.

Authorities warned that with unpredictable winds and extremely dry fuels, the risk of

flare-ups remained high.

In recent days, lightning sparked two wildfires that threatened remote homes in California’s Shasta-Trinity National Forest. Evacuation warnings remained in place Aug 1 for communities along the Trinity River.

In Montana, a wind-driven wildfire destroyed more than a dozen homes, outbuildings and other structures, authorities said Aug. 1. Evacuations were ordered after flames jumped a highway and moved toward communities near Flathead Lake in the northwestern part of the state.

Crews also battled major blazes in Northeastern Wash-

ington and Northern Idaho.

Nearly 22,000 firefighters and support personnel were battling 91 large, active wildfires covering 2,813 square miles in mostly western states, the National Interagency Fire Center said.

A historic drought and recent heat waves tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists say climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

The U.S. Drought Monitor

reported last week that while a monsoon has delivered rainfall to the Southwest, critically dry conditions persist across Northern California and the Northwest, where there has been an expansion of “exceptional drought,” the worst category.

Dry conditions and winds made for dangerous fire conditions in Hawaii. A wind advisory was issued Aug 1 for portions of Lanai, Maui and the Big Island. A fast-moving wildfire on Hawaii’s Big Island grew to 62.5 square miles, prompting mandatory evacuation orders. Those orders — which forced thousands of residents out of their

homes — were lifted that evening. However, authorities told residents to remain alert.

“County officials ask all residents of the affected areas to only return home if absolutely necessary,” Hawaii County spokesperson Cyrus Johnsen said.

In a statement, “Smoke and other conditions may make returns unsafe for those with prior and underlying respiratory conditions.”

Local media reported at least two homes had been destroyed. Two community shelters were open for residents who weren’t able to return home, the Hawaii Red Cross said.

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