

# Local & Region

## Feds propose to remove protection for gray wolves in Lower 48 states

By Matthew Brown and John Flesher  
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — U.S. wildlife officials plan to lift protections for gray wolves across the Lower 48 states, a move certain to re-ignite the legal battle over a predator that's rebounding in some regions and running into conflicts with farmers and ranchers, an official told The Associated Press.

Acting Interior Secretary David Bernhardt was expected to announce the proposal during a Wednesday speech before a wildlife conference in Denver, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Spokesman Gavin Shire said in an interview with the AP.

The decision to lift protections is based on gray wolves successfully recovering from widespread extermination last century, Shire said. He said further details would be

made public during a formal announcement planned in coming days.

Long despised by farmers and ranchers, wolves were shot, trapped and poisoned out of existence in most of the U.S. by the mid-20th century.

They received endangered species protections in 1975, when there were about 1,000 left, only in northern Minnesota. Now more than 5,000 of the animals live in the contiguous U.S.

Most are in the Western Great Lakes and Northern Rockies regions. Protections for the Northern Rockies population were lifted in 2011 and hundreds are now killed annually by hunters.

State officials say wolves have continued to thrive despite pressure from hunting. The animals are prolific breeders and can adapt to a variety of habitats.

Wildlife advocates want federal protections kept in place until wolves repopulate more of their historic range that once stretched across most of North America.

Since being reintroduced in Yellowstone National park and central Idaho in the mid-1990s, the Northern Rockies population has expanded to parts of Oregon, Washington and California.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has argued for years that the gray wolf has recovered in the lower 48 states, despite occupying only a small fraction of the territory it once roamed. Agency officials insist that recovery of wolves everywhere is not required for the species to no longer be in danger of extinction.

The government first proposed revoking the wolf's protected status across the Lower 48 states in 2013, but

backed off after federal courts struck down its plan for "delisting" the species in the western Great Lakes region states of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Fish and Wildlife Service officials disclosed to the AP last year that another scientific review of the animal's status had been launched.

Shire declined to disclose the agency's rationale for its decision the species had recovered, but said members of the public would have a chance to comment before a final decision in coming months.

Lawmakers in Congress frustrated with court rulings maintaining protections for wolves have backed legislation to forcibly strip protections for wolves in the Great Lakes region and beyond. A similar effort by lawmakers succeeded in 2011 for Northern Rockies wolves.

## Washington House passes vaccine bill

By Rachel La Corte  
Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — As health officials continue to monitor an outbreak concentrated in southwest Washington, the state House approved a measure that would remove parents' ability to claim a personal or philosophical exemption to vaccinating their school-age children for measles.

The vote comes in the midst of an outbreak that has sickened at least 71 people — mostly children age 10 and younger.

The chamber passed the bill on a 57-40 vote late Tuesday night and it now heads to the Senate, which is expected to

vote in the coming days on its own bill, which is broader. While the House bill removes the philosophical exemption for just the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, the Senate measure seeks to remove such exemptions for any required school vaccinations.

Republicans initially introduced more than three dozen floor amendments, but withdrew most of them before the late night vote after majority Democrats agreed to accept a few of them, including one that exempts a child from the requirement if a parent or legal guardian presents a written certification that a biological parent or sibling has immune system problems or adverse reactions to

a particular vaccine.

It's unclear which measure Washington lawmakers will ultimately move forward with if the Senate passes its measure before next week's deadline to get policy bills voted out of the chamber of origin. The 105-day legislative session ends April 28.

Washington is among 17 states that allow some type of non-medical vaccine exemption for "personal, moral or other beliefs," according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In addition, medical and religious exemptions exist for attendance at the state's public or private schools or licensed day-care centers.

## Idaho Court says defamation can be implied

By Rebecca Boone  
Associated Press

BOISE — The Idaho Supreme Court says individuals have the right to sue if they think someone implied — but didn't outright say — something defamatory.

The ruling was handed down Monday in a lawsuit brought by former teacher James Verity against USA Today, Boise television station KTVB, KGW television in Portland, Oregon, and others in the news industry after the organizations reported on a national investigation that showed teachers who lost teaching licenses in one state were often able to move to another state to be licensed there.

James Verity was included in the story. He lost his Oregon

teaching license after he was disciplined for having inappropriate sexual contact with an 18-year-old student. Verity was later able to obtain a teaching license in Idaho.

The unanimous Idaho Supreme Court said neither USA Today nor KTVB actually defamed Verity by implication, and ordered the claims against them be dropped, along with the claims against USA Today reporter Steve Reilly and KTVB reporter Tami Tremblay. But the high court said a jury should decide if KGW or two other networks who broadcast similar but less descriptive versions of the news story committed defamation by implication because they didn't specifically mention that the student was 18, and they didn't clarify the

nature of the sexual contact Verity had with the student.

In the ruling, Idaho Supreme Court Justice Richard Bevan noted that the news organizations contended that the creation of a "defamation by implication" standard contradicts a long-standing principle of Idaho law: That truth is a complete defense to libel and defamation claims.

"This principle remains good law; however, true statements that by context or as framed lead to a conclusion that the publisher intended or endorsed a defamatory meaning by the information published, are actionable," Bevan wrote.

So, if someone who wants to sue for defamation or libel can prove that a false implication was made with the intent to

defame, the lawsuit can go forward. The court said that's true even in matters of public concern — such as when a teacher has a sexual relationship with an 18-year-old student.

According to the court ruling, Verity and his wife Sarahna Verity both held teaching positions with the Crook County School District in Prineville, Oregon, from 1998 to 2005. James Verity taught middle school and coached several sports, including high school varsity girls' basketball and softball.

Sometime around 2005, James Verity began an inappropriate relationship with an 18-year-old student that he coached and used as a tutor for his middle school science class.

## Merkley won't run for president in 2020

By Andrew Selsky  
Associated Press

SALEM — U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon has decided not to enter the increasingly crowded race for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination after months of consideration.



Merkley

Merkley told The Associated Press the large field of Democratic contenders for the White House was not a major factor in his decision, nor was an Oregon law that prevents him from being on the ballot for more than one elected office in any given year.

"I've never shied from a fight, and there's nothing about the field that would make me reluctant to be there," Merkley said.

Merkley, who planned to formally announce his intentions on Tuesday, said in a

telephone interview that he decided he would be more effective running for his third term in the Senate than being a candidate for the presidency.

He aims to fight anti-democracy moves including voter suppression, gerrymandering and dark money. He said he also wants to focus on helping families by improving health care, education and access to living-wage jobs and on stemming climate change.

"These are the things we feel like we have to take on, and we have to take them on boldly and aggressively," Merkley said.

He is not endorsing any candidate yet but said he is impressed by many of those Democrats who have already declared their candidacy or intention to run.

"If you're running, you've got to present a credible and determined vision on how

you'll take on these problems," he advised the growing field.

In just the past few days, former Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper and current Washington Gov. Jay Inslee launched their presidential bids, and Hillary Clinton and former Attorney General Eric Holder said they're not running.

Merkley expressed guarded optimism that Democrats might regain control of the Senate in 2020, girded by opposition to President Donald Trump.

If the House were to impeach Trump, the Senate would act as jury in a trial overseen by the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and Merkley would have a seat in the juror box, something he indicated he anticipates happening.

"The House has the responsibility of taking the first step," Merkley said. "As a

future juror, let me just withhold my thoughts until the House has acted, and I have a responsibility to play that role in the Senate."

## OREGON BRIEFING

### Malheur Refuge occupier, living in Baker City, arrested, then released

PORTLAND (AP) — An Oregon refuge occupier who has been living in Baker City was briefly back in custody and appeared before a federal magistrate judge on an accusation of violating the conditions of his supervised release.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reports Jason Scott Patrick, 46, was sentenced in February 2017 to one year and nine months in prison in the armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. A jury convicted Patrick of conspiracy to impede federal workers through intimidation, threat or violence, a felony. A judge convicted him of trespass, tampering with vehicles and equipment and destruction or removal of property, all misdemeanors.

At the time of his sentence, he had already served 16 months. He was released from federal prison March 30, 2018.

Oregon State Police Sgt. Ty Duby arrested Patrick at about 2 p.m. on Feb. 27 at his trailer, which was parked at the A-Frame RV Park just north of Baker City.

Court-appointed lawyer Thomas Price said Monday that Patrick denies the allegations.

Patrick was released pending a preliminary hearing Thursday.

### Some Oregonians still without power after late February snowstorm

PORTLAND (AP) — Parts of Oregon are still without power a week after a major snowstorm, and it could be several more weeks before everything is fixed as crews deal with downed trees and impassable roadways.

KGW reports that Douglas Electric Cooperative has crews working all over southern Oregon, but say that in some of the worst-hit areas, it could be another three weeks before electricity is back on.

As of Monday morning, more than 4,800 customers, or about 54 percent of those in the co-op's coverage area, were still experiencing outages.

The co-op says it has crews working with people from Douglas County and the Oregon Department of Transportation to help cut and dig their way into damaged areas.

Elkton, Scottsburg, Curtain and the Upper Smith River area are listed as communities where power could take up to three weeks to restore.

At least four shelters opened in Douglas County for those without heat and electricity. The shelter in Elkton also is offering showers and meals to those who need help but don't want to sleep there, the sheriff's office said in a statement Monday.

To the north, another hard-hit area was also slow to get power back.

About 4,000 residents of Lane County — home of the University of Oregon — were still without power on Monday, one week after a snowstorm struck the central Willamette Valley.

Power is expected to be mostly restored by Thursday or sooner in most areas, but extensive damage to the electrical system along Highway 126 from heavy snow and downed trees made repairs challenging.

### Oregon agencies paid \$15.24 million to resolve claims during fiscal 2018

SALEM (AP) — Big liability payouts continued to plague Oregon state agencies last year.

In fiscal year 2018, The Statesman Journal reports the state shelled out \$15.24 million to resolve claims.

Settlements are paid through the Oregon Department of Administrative Service's self-insurance fund. The department's risk management office bills state agencies every two years for "risk charges," which are collected and put into the fund.

Payouts can vary widely from year to year.

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