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Removing gray wolves from federal protection ignores evidence and history, researchers say

February 3, 2014

Researchers from five universities argue that the proposed removal of gray wolves from protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) would be a mistake and potentially affect future decisions regarding threatened and endangered animals.

Writing in the latest issue of the journal *Conservation Letters*, the group, which includes Nelson Institute associate professor [Adrian Treves](#), contends that the proposed action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is based on a “definition of endangerment that is inconsistent with the legislative history and historical implementation of the ESA, as well as numerous court rulings.”

“The federal agency administering the ESA ignored over 100 peer-reviewed scientific articles when they framed this decision,” says Treves.

The proposed action would affect gray wolves throughout the lower 48 states, except for the Mexican wolf subspecies found in the Southwest. The agency contends that areas where wolves no longer exist are “unsuitable habitat,” because people in these areas supposedly lack tolerance for wolves. But the researchers say peer-reviewed scientific studies show greater public acceptance of wolves in wolf recovery areas, contrary to what the agency asserted.

Treves argues that removing federal protection for the wolves would change the meaning of the word ‘recovery’ under the law.

“It seems clear from both Congressional intent and court precedent that the Endangered Species Act mandates recovery to a ‘significant portion of range,’ and range in this case refers to historic extent,” he says. “Gray wolf range is currently less than 15 percent of its historic extent. If the proposal succeeds, many threatened and endangered species could be deemed ‘recovered’ in whatever area they have been reduced to using.”

The group, which includes university researchers from Ohio State, Minnesota, Oregon State

and Michigan Tech, argues that removing protections for the wolves could set a precedent that limits recovery efforts for other species protected by the Endangered Species Act.

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