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# Delisting wolves will mean an increase in illegal killing

Yet the Trump administration proceeds with removing Endangered Species Act protections

BY ADRIAN TREVES

NOVEMBER 2, 2020

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WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**Poaching has been the major source of mortality for gray (above), red and Mexican wolves in the U.S.**

We know the consequences of delisting wolves — that is, removing Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for gray wolves — as President Trump's administration **announced it was doing on Oct. 29**. Scientists can now predict the future for wolves with some certainty.

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now in Idaho **SUPPORT ISTHMUS**. This time federal protection under the ESA was relaxed in the past (six times in Michigan and Wisconsin), private hunters, trappers and hounders did their part, and government agents using poison, explosives, shooting and aerial gunning did the rest. This time is unlikely to differ given those in power now are more anti-wolf than past administrations.

The Office of Management and Budget's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs **concluded its review** of the rule on Oct. 26. Before then, I met virtually with them to explain what I think is the most important science, and how I thought delisting would increase environmental crime, cost livestock owners more, lead to more animal deaths, and waste taxpayer money.

Crime follows legalizing wolf-killing: We will probably see a spike in the crime of poaching, or illegal killing. Poaching doesn't just happen in faraway places like Africa, nor does it seem noble like Robin Hood's acts. Poaching has been the major source of mortality for gray, red and Mexican wolves in the U.S. (all endangered species protected explicitly from intentional and unintentional harm). Poaching is often intentional, hide-the-evidence crime, some of it organized by pro-trophy hunting and pro-gun groups and the rest by "delinquent hunters" (another euphemism for those irresponsible with guns). The latest estimate by **Francisco Santiago-Ávila** in 2020 suggests as many wolves will be poached as are intentionally killed by the state agents. White House policy invites crime in this case.

Wolf killing begets more killing. There are two reasons why an accelerating number of wolves and domestic animals are likely to die after delisting. The first is that the men who want to kill wolves will ask to kill yet more wolves. **Christine Browne-Nuñez's work** in 2015 made that clear. The apologists for wolf-killing will also trot out the debunked claims that legal killing reduces poaching and raises tolerance for wolves. Survey research with Wisconsin residents conducted five times since 2001 culminated in **Jamie Hogberg's 2015 research** that suggests human attitudes soured to wolves and inclinations to poach them increased among men living in Wisconsin's wolf range after delisting — and the biggest death toll since wolf-bounties were enacted. Killing to conserve is myth.

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attacks on d **SUPPORT ISTHMUS** lamely, stable wolf packs prefer to hunt deer, not livestock. Wolf packs suffering human persecution might break into smaller fragments. Think of a sports team that lost teammates but has to play on — not for imaginary points but food to avoid starvation. The survivors might go after the more predictable big herds in fenced pastures, because the team used to hunt wily, fast, unpredictable deer. So the risk to domestic animals and people might increase. Scientists now think wolf killing is a shot in the dark. Moreover public hunting, trapping and hounding seasons are usually done in the wrong place, at the wrong time of year, by folks with no idea who is the culprit. Research by over two dozen scientists from a dozen nations now agrees that killing predators has a poor track record of success and the evidence is better for non-lethal methods tested with the gold-standard of randomized controlled experiments (as **reported in 2018** by Lily van Eeden and 21 top scientists).

Another issue that might trouble us and the federal government is that Native American nations in our region view the wolf as brother and companion. Tribes oppose state policies on wolves. So expect another round of tension between the sovereign tribes and the co-sovereign states of our region with federal treaty rights as supreme under the U.S. Constitution. Those state and tribal tensions affected fishing, wild rice, deer, and many other natural resource issues in the past. Given a federal law protecting eagles from poaching, a similar one designating wolves as non-game doesn't seem far-fetched.

We can also predict the response of scientists because last year four scientists and I **reviewed the White House's science** behind its proposal to delist gray wolves. Each of us found major shortcomings in the proposal. Most scientists seem intimidated about contradicting governments because wildlife grant dollars flow from agencies. Many scientists are unable to advocate for the public because their donors might not like transparency. That system needs reform against corruption, but today's battle is for the Endangered Species Act and the security of wolves that taxpayers have paid so much to ensure for the last four decades.

Madison.

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