

# STATE *of the* WOLF

## 2004





## ABOUT DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

**D**efenders of Wildlife is a leading conservation organization recognized as one of the nation's most progressive advocates for wildlife and its habitat. Defenders uses education, litigation, research and promotion of conservation policies to protect wild animals and plants in their natural communities. Founded in 1947, Defenders of Wildlife is a 501(c)(3) membership organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C., and 480,000 members nationwide.

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1130 17th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 682-9400



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## INTRODUCTION

In January 1995, Defenders of Wildlife joined with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to bring wolves back to Yellowstone and Idaho. Nearly a decade later, these areas once again echo with the howl of wolves—truly one of our country's greatest conservation success stories. To celebrate the upcoming ten-year anniversary of this monumental occasion, Defenders of Wildlife is issuing its first State of the Wolf report. This document provides a snapshot in time of the ongoing recovery of the wolf nationwide and the threats that still jeopardize the future of these majestic creatures.

When Europeans first set foot on North America, the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) ranged across the continent from Mexico to Canada and Alaska, and from the Pacific to the Atlantic. The forests of what is now the southeastern United States also were home to the red wolf (*Canis rufus*). The two species combined may have numbered as many as 400,000 prior to European contact. By the 1970s, however, three centuries of persecution had eliminated both species from the wild everywhere in the contiguous United States except in northeastern Minnesota, where fewer than 1,000 gray wolves remained.

Today, both gray and red wolves are making a comeback in the lower 48 states. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reintroduced the gray wolf in central Idaho and in the Yellowstone ecosystem of Wyoming,

Montana and Idaho in 1995 and they continue to expand their numbers today. Gray wolf populations have also increased substantially in Minnesota and wolves have recolonized parts of Wisconsin, Michigan and Montana. Fish and Wildlife Service reintroductions also are returning the Mexican gray wolf to Arizona and red wolves to North Carolina.

Despite these gains, wolves still occupy less than five percent of their original range in the lower 48 states, and the seemingly healthy wolf populations in Alaska and Canada face continued threats. Biologists believe there are other areas of potential wolf habitat — including the Northeast, southern Rockies, Pacific Northwest and northern Mexico — that have yet to see restoration take place.

The long-term survival of the wolf depends on maintaining wolf populations that are large enough to ensure the viability of the species. But even though viable wolf populations are increasingly seen as essential to healthy ecosystems and the economic benefits wolves bring to areas where they are restored are increasingly being realized, the overall future of the wolf remains questionable.

In the pages that follow we provide a region-by-region breakdown of North America's wolf populations. Each section includes an update on the current status of the wolf in that region, including latest population estimates, as well as a discussion of the threats facing wolves and prospects for future recovery efforts.

Defenders of Wildlife was there in 1995 when the wolf was reintroduced to the Yellowstone ecosystem and we remain committed to ensuring the recovery of the wolf continues in a way that benefits both humans and wolves.

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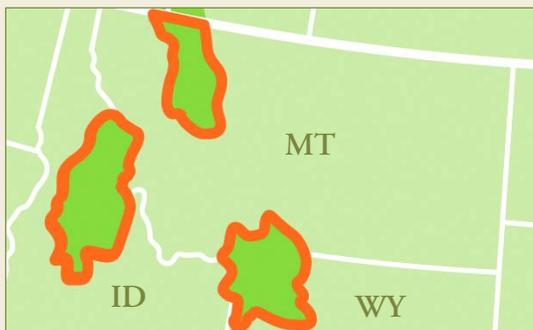
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# GRAY WOLVES

## Northern Rockies



 Occupied recovery area

### CURRENT POPULATION:

*Yellowstone Ecoregion* — 301  
*Central Idaho* — 368  
*Northwest Montana* — 92

## Background

Gray wolves were once common throughout the northern Rocky Mountains, but a government predator control program eliminated wolves from this area, including Yellowstone National Park, by the 1930s. Defenders of Wildlife has been working to restore wolves to this region for nearly three decades, culminating in the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and Idaho in 1995. Since then, Defenders has been a leading education and advocacy resource on the wolf and has led innovative efforts to bridge the gap with local stakeholders opposed to wolf reintroduction. Defenders established the hugely successful The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Wolf Compensation Trust that compensates ranchers for any verified livestock losses to

wolves. More recently, Defenders established The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Proactive Carnivore Compensation Fund, which helps ranchers take steps to prevent livestock depredation from occurring. The restoration of wolves in this region is one of the greatest American wildlife conservation success stories of this century.



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## How You Can Help:

### Five things citizens can do to help restore wolves

1. Stay informed. Sign up for *Wolflines*, Defenders' bi-weekly, electronic newsletter to keep abreast of current wolf issues: [www.defenders.org/den/](http://www.defenders.org/den/)
2. Get involved. Respond to alerts for comments on federal and state actions regarding wolves.
3. Tell a teacher about our wolf education curriculum for grades K-12. Visit the Teacher's Table at [www.kidsplanet.org](http://www.kidsplanet.org), our Web site for children, to preview this program of integrated lesson plans.
4. Take an ecotourism vacation to Yellowstone, northeastern North Carolina, Canada, Alaska or other natural areas where wolves reside. Be sure to use local tour operators and support the local economy, which helps foster positive attitudes towards wolves.
5. Help support Defenders' work. Visit [www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org) to learn how you can contribute.

## Current Status and Threats

The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently looking to remove federal protections and return management of the species to the states. The first step in this direction occurred in 2003 when the Bush administration released a rule to "re-classify" wolves throughout the lower 48 states, removing protections entirely in some areas and weakening them in others. In the northern Rockies, the Fish and Wildlife Service lumped wolves in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming and six other western states into a single group, but did so without expanding population recovery goals beyond Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. Under this rule, wolves would be declared recovered throughout the northern Rockies once population goals were met in these three states — even though northern California and Colorado, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Washington do not yet have wolves. Before this can happen, though, the northern Rockies states must develop acceptable management plans. To date, the Fish and Wildlife Service has approved the wolf management plans of Montana and Idaho, but has rejected Wyoming's plan, which allowed for widespread, indiscriminate killing of wolves in 90 percent of the state.

Also of great concern is the Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal to hand control of wolves over to the states prior to an official federal delisting. This would weaken federal protections for wolves before their recovery goals have been met. Under the proposal, any citizen could essentially kill wolves based on the belief that the animals pose a threat to personal property. Protecting private property is vitally important, but allowing wolves to be killed based on the belief of a threat would invite abuse and unnecessary killing and would create unenforceable and potentially unmanageable situations adversely affecting wolf populations.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal would also allow state agencies to kill wolves if they want

to raise elk numbers, even if wolves are not a significant factor in declining elk populations. Proposed provisions would lead to intense public and political pressure to reduce wolf numbers without evaluating all factors that affect elk populations (habitat, harvest, disease, weather, other predators, etc.). Such management actions, based on misinformation, fear and political pressures, could jeopardize ongoing recovery and delisting efforts and lead to negative and long-lasting impacts on endangered gray wolf populations in Idaho and Montana.

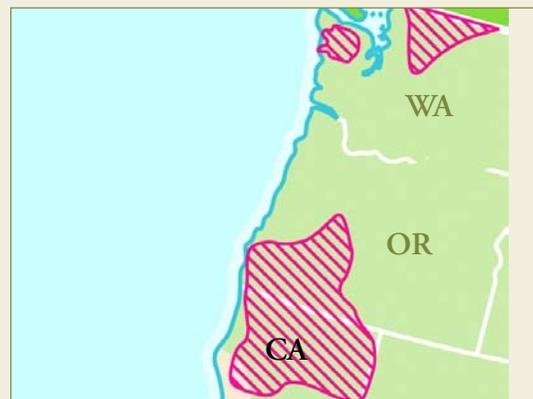
Defenders is currently leading a group of 19 plaintiffs in a lawsuit the against the Fish and Wildlife Service's effort to remove protections for wolves across the western states without suitable state management plans, and without expanding their range into states with significant suitable habitat. The Yellowstone and Idaho wolf reintroduction was a great first step, but wolves should be allowed to recolonize their former habitat to the extent possible and feasible. As wolves play a vital role in the native ecosystems across the west, biological needs should outweigh anti-wolf politics in the decision to restore the species.

## The Future

January 2005 marks the 10th anniversary of the wolf reintroduction to Idaho and Yellowstone National Park and a crossroads for wolf conservation in the West. As we celebrate the success of this program, Defenders is proud of our contributions. As of October 2004, through The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Wolf Compensation Trust, Defenders of Wildlife has voluntarily contributed more than \$400,000 to western ranchers and family farmers for livestock losses related to wolves in the northern Rockies. Additionally, we have invested more than \$300,000 in preventative approaches and assistance to livestock owners since the establishment of The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Proactive Carnivore Conservation Fund in 1999. Our philosophy is to

work with livestock owners and other stakeholders to find a mutually beneficial pathway toward wolf and human co-existence. We have established a livestock producer advisory council to help us evaluate and adapt these programs to meet changing needs while providing meaningful assistance to wolves and residents in the region. As the wolf population increases, conflicts with livestock and hunting interests will bring an increased need for our programs. Wolf supporters must vigilantly monitor state management plans to ensure on-going conservation success after delisting, especially during the early stages.

## Pacific Northwest



 Potential recovery area

### CURRENT POPULATION:

*No known populations at this time.  
Individual wolves spotted in Washington  
and Oregon.*

## Background

Gray wolves once lived throughout much of the Pacific Northwest but, as in other areas, extermination campaigns eliminated wolves from this region in the 1930s. Bounty records, settlers' travel diaries



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and other government documents attest to the widespread presence of wolves in Oregon and Washington but less information is available on wolves in California. Recent searches of historical records and information from California Native American sources suggest the wolf was widely distributed throughout the state.

## Current Status and Threats

In recent years, wolves from the northern Rockies have made their way into both Oregon and Washington. In February 2002, a wolf from northwestern Montana traveled briefly into eastern

Washington before disappearing into British Columbia. Between February 1999 and September 2000, three wolves from Idaho moved west into northeastern Oregon. The first was captured and returned to Idaho, the second was struck and killed by a car and the third illegally shot. Each year federal and state wildlife officials receive numerous reports of purported wolf sightings in Oregon, and the number has been on the rise since 1999. No confirmed wolf sightings have occurred in California.

Both Washington and Oregon list the gray wolf as endangered on their state endangered species lists, while California has omitted the wolf from its list. The increasing number of reported wolf sightings in

Oregon, as well as the species' protected status under state law, spurred the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to develop a state wolf management plan. The plan, which was developed with the assistance of a 14-member advisory committee that included a Defenders' representative, has just been completed and is now being circulated for public comment. The plan has met with some resistance from segments of the livestock producer and hunting communities, though both were represented on the advisory committee. The 2005 Oregon state legislative session may also see renewed attacks on state protections for wolves, as occurred in the 2003 session when more than nine anti-wolf bills were introduced.

In Washington, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing an interim strategy plan for wolves. However, no movement has been seen in the development of a state wolf plan, and a 2003 bill introduced in the Washington legislature would have prohibited wolf reintroduction in the state.

California's failure to list the wolf as a protected species poses a threat if wolves appear in the state, as expected.

California, Oregon and Washington are all part of the nine-state area delineated in the Fish and Wildlife Service's 2003 gray wolf reclassification rule, resulting in a reduction in federal protections, from endangered to threatened, in these states. If federal safeguards are removed altogether, wolves in California would be without any protection and wolves in Washington would have no conservation plan in place.

## The Future

Several scientific studies have demonstrated that many areas of potentially suitable habitat for wolves remain in the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, in recent years wolves have been reliably sighted in Washington and Oregon. Because of their proximity to wolf populations in British Columbia and

Alberta, as well as to recovering populations in northwestern Montana, Washington state's North Cascades and Selkirk Mountains have a high potential for natural wolf recolonization. In fact, several wolf packs have denned and raised pups in recent years in the North Cascades National Recreation Area along the Canadian border.

Another area targeted for wolf recovery is Washington's Olympic Peninsula. A feasibility study of the area found sufficient habitat to support about 60 wolves. Any wolf recovery for this area would require translocating animals, however, as development in the Seattle-Tacoma area blocks the wolf's return to the Olympic Peninsula without human help.

Other possible restoration sites include the Blue Mountains of southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon, the Siskiyou Mountains of southern Oregon and northern California, and the northern Sierra Nevada in California. Studies have shown that as many as 470 wolves could live in a complex of wildlands that include the Modoc Plateau of California and Oregon and the southern Oregon Cascades, and a recent study estimated that Oregon could support as many as 2,200 wolves.

Washington's Northern Cascades contains more than 9 million acres of federally controlled lands with substantial amounts of potential wolf habitat available. Dispersing wolves from Idaho are, at this time, the most likely source population for wolves in Washington, Oregon and California, though wolves dispersing south from British Columbia into the Cascades could provide an additional source.

Defenders will continue to lead efforts to restore wolves to all three states in the Pacific Northwest. In order to help pave the way for wolf recovery, Defenders has offered to extend The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Wolf Compensation Trust to any of the states where wolves disperse from the Northern Rockies. We also work closely with regional conservation groups to conduct education and advocacy.

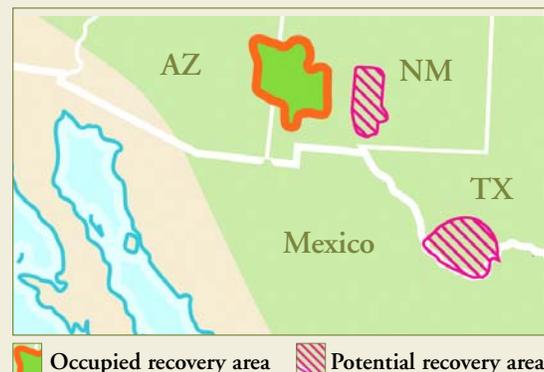
## Putting Our Money Where Our Mouth Is ...

**W**olves, grizzly bears and other predators are slowly reclaiming parts of their former ranges in the lower 48 states and elsewhere in North America. Occasionally, these carnivores may prey on livestock or cause other problems. Defenders believes that those who seek more room for predators have a responsibility to help resolve conflicts associated with the recovery of these animals.

Working with landowners, resource managers and others to prevent or reduce predator problems has important conservation benefits. Human-caused wolf deaths, including illegal killings and lethal control by government agencies in response to livestock predation incidents, remains the single leading cause of wolf mortality in the northern Rockies and the Southwest.

Defenders created The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Wolf and Grizzly Compensation Trusts to reimburse livestock owners for verified losses to these predators. The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Proactive Carnivore Conservation Fund was developed more recently to prevent conflict between imperiled predators and humans before it occurs. If landowners or other entities have repeated predator problems, we ask them to propose projects that will help reduce conflict, such as putting up electric fencing, using livestock guardian dogs or other techniques. If the concept is practical and within our means, we share the cost of the project. We believe our success at expanding the range of predators across the West and elsewhere will be directly proportional to our success at reducing conflict between predators and humans.

## Southwest United States and Mexico



### CURRENT POPULATION:

*Arizona/New Mexico — 26 wolves with radio collars. As many as 25-30 additional wolves*

## Background

The Southwest was once home to the Mexican wolf, or “El lobo,” a gray wolf subspecies that ranged from southern Arizona, New Mexico and southwestern Texas to the mountains of southcentral Mexico. After the population crashed, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service captured four males and a female in Mexico between 1977 and 1980. These animals were the last known Mexican wolves in the wild, and were used to found a captive-breeding program.

In 1982, Fish and Wildlife Service adopted a recovery plan for Mexican wolves that called for a captive breeding program followed by reintroduction of captive-born animals to the wild. The plan called for re-establishing a self-sustaining population of at least 100 Mexican wolves within their historic range. Mexican wolves were released in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area west of the Arizona-New Mexico border starting in 1998. More releases have

occurred since then, including as recently as August 2004, which brought the known wild population to approximately 50 wolves. The Mexican wolf recovery program was initiated as a joint effort with Mexico and plans are currently underway for similar restoration efforts to take place south of the border.

## Current Status and Threats

The captive-bred Mexican wolves that were released into Arizona and New Mexico successfully retained the instincts to survive in the wild and quickly began forming pairs and reproducing, identifying and killing native prey, and establishing and defending territories. Unfortunately the wolves are threatened by illegal killing: At least twenty Mexican wolves have been shot during the first six years of the reintroduction program.

Mexican wolves are also threatened by a flawed “special rule” that governs the program. The rule maintains an unnecessary boundary around the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area that prohibits the recolonization of suitable areas outside it. This has resulted in the unnecessary recapture and/or removal of wolves that have caused no problems with humans or livestock, but have simply wandered across this arbitrarily drawn political boundary. Additionally, the rule prohibits direct releases of wolves into the Gila Wilderness, which contains the best wolf habitat in the entire Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area.

Fortunately the White Mountain Apache Tribe has agreed to encourage wolf recovery on their reservation and participates fully in the wolf management program. The Tribe’s cooperation has added 1.6 million acres of prime wolf habitat to the wolf recovery area, which currently hosts at least two resident packs.

## The Future

A modification to the “special rule” allowing wolves to expand their population by establishing territories in suitable habitats is necessary for the wolf recovery program to succeed. The rule change will reduce the number of wolves that are recaptured or removed from the program simply for straying across political lines and will allow the Interagency Field Team to place wolves into areas where their chances of survival are greatly improved.

Long-term wolf recovery requires opening new habitat areas in the region to support additional populations. Defenders has worked with partners in the region to conduct reintroduction feasibility studies that have identified several areas that are suitable for wolves. These areas include the Grand Canyon ecoregion, the Sky Islands borderlands (which spans the U.S.-Mexico border), the Apache Highlands (White Mountain and San Carlos Apache Reservations) and northern Mexico. Additionally, the Chiricahua Mountains in southern Arizona and Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park in Texas offer habitat suitable for low numbers of wolves. Two of the best sites remaining in northern Mexico are the Sierra San Luis complex in northern Sonora and the Sierra del Carmen area southeast of Big Bend National Park. Defenders continues to work with officials and organizations in Mexico to help prepare for wolf recovery through continued habitat studies and by providing opportunities for Mexican biologists to gain hands-on experience with wild wolves.

To help ensure the success of the reintroduction effort and promote population expansion, Defenders has expanded The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Wolf Compensation Trust to reimburse ranchers in the Southwest for livestock taken by wolves, offered a substantial reward for information leading to the arrest of wolf killers, and conducted proactive projects to prevent livestock depredation, help monitor and protect newly released animals, as well as build tolerance for wolves among local citizens.

### Southern Rockies

The map displays the Southern Rockies region, covering parts of Utah (UT), Arizona (AZ), New Mexico (NM), and Colorado (CO). A pink hatched area indicates the 'Potential recovery area', which is primarily located in the southern and eastern portions of New Mexico and extends into the southern parts of Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. A legend below the map shows a pink hatched box next to the text 'Potential recovery area'.

**CURRENT POPULATION:**

*No known population at this time, although a lone female wolf that had apparently strayed from the Yellowstone region was found dead in Colorado in 2004.*

## Background

Gray wolves roamed the southern Rockies until their complete eradication in the early 1900s. Fortunately, this area contains some of the best wolf habitat remaining in the lower 48 states. The Fish and Wildlife Service's own studies estimate that the region is capable of hosting as many as 1,100 wolves. Furthermore, more than 60 percent of the land in the southern Rockies is publicly owned, which could simplify wolf management.

Tragically, the same anti-conservation efforts that are jeopardizing wolf recovery nationwide also threaten potential recovery in places such as the southern Rockies. This is especially troubling as many recovery options remain here, and natural systems have degraded significantly in the absence of top-level predators such as the wolf. In February 2000, regional and national conservation groups joined to form the Southern Rockies Wolf

Restoration Project. This group is dedicated to restoring the wolf and throughout the region.

## Current Status and Threats

Despite the ability of the region to contribute significantly toward wolf restoration, the Fish and Wildlife Service is pursuing delisting of gray wolves in the area and has no formal plans for restoring wolves to the southern portions of the Rockies. Because of the likelihood that federal delisting efforts will prevent or significantly frustrate wolf recovery in the southern Rockies, Defenders and a broad coalition of conservation organizations have filed a lawsuit to prevent premature delisting and, instead, require federal wildlife managers to consider the significant wolf restoration potential of areas such as the southern Rockies.

Additionally, the state of Colorado assembled a Wolf Management Working Group to address wolf management issues in the state. Defenders is working via the Southern Rockies Wolf Restoration Project and in concert with other working group members to help shape a state wolf management plan that encourages both re-colonization and direct reintroduction into suitable areas of the region.

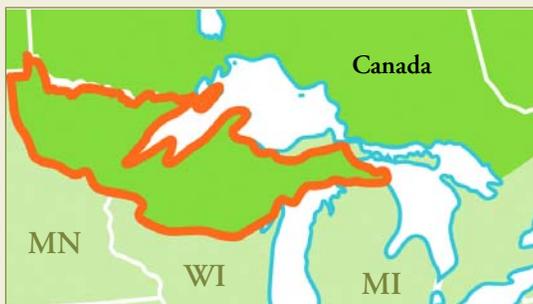
## The Future

The southern Rockies offer several potential gray wolf restoration sites, including the Vermejo Ranch Park/Carson National Forest complex, the San Juan Mountains, Rocky Mountain National Park and the Gunnison National Recreation Area. Indeed, these areas could support an estimated 400 to 1,200 wolves. Other areas that could support wolves include large private tracts of land, such as media executive Ted Turner's Vermejo Ranch,

straddling the Colorado-New Mexico border. Turner's lands demonstrate the potential of private landowners to contribute to wolf restoration and the need to develop mechanisms at the state and federal level to encourage more private participation in recovery efforts.

The southern Rockies has ample habitat to support wolves, but some conflicts with livestock will occasionally occur. Defenders has extended its compensation fund and proactive programs to cover this area to both minimize the likelihood of conflicts and to mitigate when they do occur.

## Great Lakes



 Occupied recovery area

### CURRENT POPULATION:

*Michigan—360*

*Minnesota—2,450*

*Wisconsin—373-410*

## Background

The subspecies of gray wolf found in the Great Lakes region, commonly called the eastern timber wolf, once ranged from Minnesota to the Atlantic Ocean and from southwest Canada to the Ohio River and perhaps farther south. Progress toward

gray wolf recovery in the Great Lakes region has been notably successful. In the 1960s, this subspecies was limited to northeastern Minnesota, where it numbered fewer than 1,000 individuals and was the last population of gray wolves in the lower 48 states.

## Current Status and Threats

Federal protections fostered recovery of wolves in this region. Today, gray wolves thrive not only in northeastern Minnesota, but also in northern Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Unfortunately, the Fish and Wildlife Service has used this success to propose delisting wolves in the entire eastern United States, including areas that could sustain wolf populations but where no recovery efforts have been made. Public comments on this proposal are being accepted until November 18, 2004.

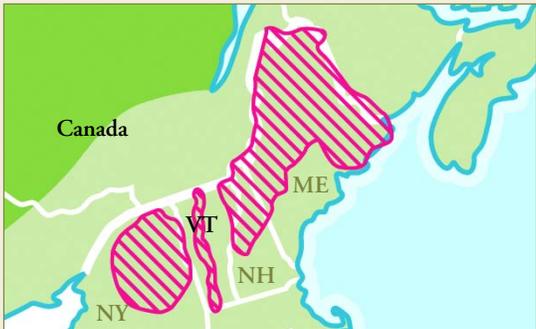
## The Future

Defenders is concerned about the loss of federal protections for wolves in the Great Lakes states. We are concerned that the state management plans for wolves in the Great Lakes states do not adequately ensure the long-term survival and viability of wolves. Minnesota's wolf plan calls for reducing the number of wolves in the state and Michigan and Wisconsin are under pressure to include public hunting seasons in their plans, a move that is premature given the recent nature of the species' recovery.

As wolf numbers increase, conflicts with humans may also increase in this region. For this reason, informational materials and workshops, which will offer ways to peacefully coexist with predators, must be readily available to farmers and other residents. Defenders is expanding its efforts to promote nonlethal, proactive measures to prevent

livestock deaths caused by wolves. We are currently helping to fund two studies testing nonlethal methods that will provide information about the usefulness of these techniques. A Defenders representative sits on the Wisconsin Wolf Stakeholder Committee, and we constantly monitor developments that may impact the success of wolves in this region.

*Northeast*



Canada  
ME  
VT  
NH  
NY

 Potential recovery area

**CURRENT POPULATION:**

*No known population at this time.*

## Background

The historic range of the eastern wolf once extended throughout the entire northeastern United States, from Hudson Bay to northern Florida. Human persecution and habitat destruction eliminated wolves from this region by the end of the nineteenth century. No established wolf populations are currently found here, although a few observations of wolves or “wolf-like” animals have been made in recent years throughout the Northeast, including Vermont, New York and Maine.

## Current Status and Threats

In their 2003 final rule to reclassify wolves in the lower 48 states, the Fish and Wildlife Service created one recovery zone (or Distinct Population Segment), for the entire eastern United States, despite the fact that no wolves are known to exist there. This “phantom” population is listed as threatened, and the Fish and Wildlife Service is currently proposing to remove federal protections for wolves in this region. If federal protections are removed, wolf management would revert back to the state management agencies that do not have wolves protected on their state endangered species lists. This would all but eliminate any chance for wolf recovery in this region.

## The Future

Defenders is concerned that the Fish and Wildlife Service’s rule arbitrarily ignores significant areas within the historic range of the gray wolf where potential exists for recovery. Uncertainty about the



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taxonomic status of similar eastern species is also complicating the situation. Given the radical changes that have occurred in the Northeast ecosystem since colonial times, and the lack of remaining physical evidence of the presence of wolves, it is difficult to determine which species may have been present historically, the larger gray wolf or the smaller red wolf — or both. For this reason, any wolf restoration in the Northeast would have to include a detailed analysis of the best source population for use in the recovery process. Continued federal protections and funding will be necessary in order to conduct research to determine the historic taxonomy of wolves in this region. Defenders is submitting comments on the federal delisting proposal, and will continue to fight in the legal system and in the court of public opinion to achieve wolf restoration in the Northeast United States.

## Alaska



### CURRENT POPULATION:

*An estimated 7,000 to 10,000 wolves.*

## Background

Alaska is the only place in the United States where wolves are not protected as an endangered species.



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The gray wolf is found throughout the state, and a subspecies, the Alexander Archipelago wolf, is found in coastal southeastern Alaska.

Wolves in Alaska have been under attack since the 1940s by those who believe the animals compete with humans for moose and caribou. A federal poisoning and aerial shooting campaign began following World War II. By the mid-1950s the government had greatly reduced wolf numbers in much of southcentral and interior Alaska. While poisoning was banned after statehood in 1959, aerial shooting and bounty payments continued through the 1960s. After the passage of the Federal Airborne Hunting Act in 1972 and the termination of the bounty, wolf numbers increased. By the mid-1970s hunters demanded state-sponsored wolf control and the

Alaska Department of Fish and Game responded with helicopter shooting programs. Considerable public opposition stopped these state-sponsored programs, but land-and-shoot hunting of wolves by private hunters continued through the 1980s into the early 1990s. The Alaska legislature also passed an Intensive Game Management Law requiring that the state's moose and caribou be managed for high consumptive use by humans, which in many areas requires huge reductions in wolf populations.

In 1996 a successful ballot measure banned public land-and-shoot wolf hunting, and limited aerial wolf killing to state employees only in cases of biological emergencies. In 1999, the Alaska legislature amended the law and removed the biological emergency clause. In 2000, it passed a law that would let private hunters implement aerial or land-and-shoot wolf control on behalf of the state. Alaska voters responded immediately with another successful ballot measure in 2000 which kept the prohibition on public aerial wolf killing in place.

In 2003, the legislature, led by Governor Frank Murkowski, overturned the ballot measure and passed a law allowing the state to issue permits to private hunters to kill wolves in areas approved for predator control. Under this law, aerial gunning teams can shoot wolves directly from the air, or chase them to exhaustion and shoot them on the ground. This could be done even in areas where moose populations were stable or growing, or had met population objectives under the Intensive Game Management law.

### Current Status and Threats

Wolves are hunted and trapped on nearly 99 percent of state land and 95 percent of federal lands in Alaska. Hunting seasons in most areas begin August 10 and end April 30, with bag limits ranging from five wolves per year to 10 per day in some areas. Trapping season runs from November 1 to April 30 and there is no limit on the number of wolves that

can be killed. Fish and Game records show an average annual harvest of 1,500 wolves during the past five years. They believe the unreported harvest could be equal or double the number killed legally.

In addition to hunting and trapping, the state has initiated several wolf-killing programs to augment moose populations for hunters. In 2004, 147 wolves were killed by aerial gunning teams in a 10,000-square-mile area. The Alaska Board of Game approved an additional 20,000 square miles in March 2004, bringing the total killing zone for the 2004-2005 winter to 30,000 square miles where nearly 500 wolves will be targeted.

Snow machine wolf hunting has also been expanded in the state and is currently permitted on tens of thousands of square miles of interior Alaska. Hunters may chase wolves to exhaustion, and in some areas shoot them directly from a moving machine.

### The Future

A small but powerful trophy hunting lobby continues to pressure state officials to expand the area for aerial wolf killing. A recent proposal that includes grizzly bear reduction programs will be deliberated upon at an upcoming Alaska Board of Game meeting. The proposal calls for an additional 20,000 square miles where 400 wolves are to be killed, including on federal park and refuge lands. Yet another proposal for expansion of the killing zone is expected at the Spring 2005 Alaska Board of Game meeting.

All programs, including those currently being implemented, are expected to last four to five years. This could result in roughly one-third to one-half of Alaska's wolf population being killed each year. Defenders is fighting on all fronts to maintain protections for Alaska's wolves.

# RED WOLVES

## North Carolina



 Occupied recovery area  Potential recovery area

### CURRENT POPULATION:

*Approximately 100 in northeastern North Carolina*

## Background

The red wolf, a smaller and more slender species than the gray wolf, once roamed throughout the southeastern United States as far north as Pennsylvania and as far west as central Texas. Because of its wide distribution, the red wolf played an important role in a variety of ecosystems, from lowlands to forested mountains.

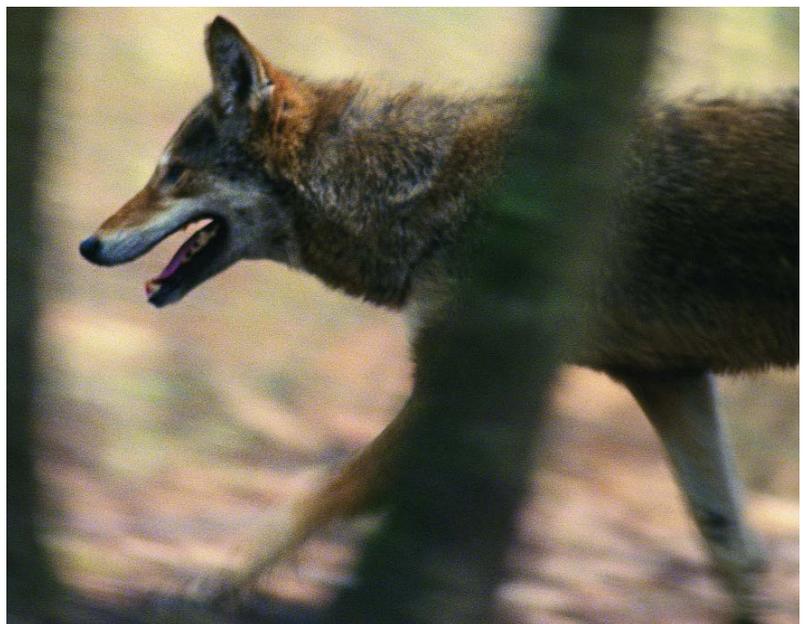
Hunted like their gray wolf cousins, red wolves by the 1970s existed only along the Gulf Coast of southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana. Gravely endangered, the last 14 red wolves in the wild were captured by Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and put into a captive-breeding program in a last-ditch effort to save the species.

Reintroduction to the wild began in the late 1980s with a successful but limited release of captive-born wolves on Bulls Island of South Carolina's

Atlantic coast. This experiment was followed by reintroduction of captive-born red wolves in Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in 1987, and later into Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern North Carolina. Notably, this was the first reintroduction of a species that was officially extinct in the wild. Red wolves were also released into Great Smoky Mountains National Park, but sadly these animals could not find sufficient food or raise young successfully and the restoration program there was ended.

## Current Status and Threats

Thanks to the efforts of Fish and Wildlife Service, today there are at least 100 red wolves residing in a five-county area of northeastern North Carolina. Population growth has been particularly strong in the past few years since officials began an intensive, and



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successful, management program to prevent hybridizing between red wolves and coyotes. The Fish and Wildlife Service recovery plan for the species calls for releasing red wolves at three separate sites to create a total wild population of 220 animals. Since the Great Smoky Mountains release did not succeed, officials will have to identify at least two additional sites for reintroducing red wolves in the Southeast.

As successful as the reintroduction has been, the existing red wolf population is not immune to threats. Despite local opposition, the U.S. Navy recently proposed building a fighter-jet landing field right in the heart of red wolf country. On top of this, the Navy has proposed designating special-use airspace over Pocosin Lakes and other areas where wolves reside. This action would lead to low-level, high-speed flights by military jets. Combined, these two proposals would result in more than 30,000 sorties a year in eastern North Carolina, bringing noise and air pollution, and hindering essential access to the red wolves by government biologists. Defenders and a coalition of other conservation groups recently won a temporary injunction against the construction of the landing field. But with the Navy appealing the case, red wolves remain in jeopardy.

At the same time, Indiana-based Rose Acre Farms is proposing to build an egg factory in North Carolina red wolf territory. The four-million chicken factory would be one of the largest egg-produc-

tion operations ever built in the United States, and would have grave impacts on the air and water quality and the environmental integrity of the area. Increased road construction for the facility will fragment red wolf habitat, and the facility itself may attract wolves where interactions with humans could prove detrimental to wolves.

### The Future

Despite the challenges, there is hope for red wolves. A 2004 study by Defenders of Wildlife demonstrated that red wolves can be a huge economic boon to the rural areas they inhabit. The study surveyed visitors to North Carolina's popular Outer Banks beach resorts, less than an hour's drive from red wolf territory. Tourists overwhelmingly said that they would spend time and money to visit the natural areas that red wolves, black bears, alligators, river otters and other wildlife call home, generating thousands of dollars in the region's rural communities. Defenders, in close collaboration with the North Carolina-based Red Wolf Coalition, is working to make these ecotourism programs a reality. Several additional potential red wolf recovery sites from Pennsylvania to Florida have also been identified, warranting further feasibility studies, as more reintroduction areas are essential for the long-term recovery of the red wolf.

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## CONCLUSION

**T**he wolf is slowly regaining its rightful place in North America's web of life. Strong public support for restoring wolves to the landscape, coupled with the impetus of the Endangered Species Act, has led to successful reintroductions in several parts of the country. But serious threats to these animals remain, and obstacles to the continued recovery of wolves across the country loom.

Defenders of Wildlife is working to overcome these challenges through ambitious outreach and education programs, innovative solutions to on-the-ground conflicts, and partnerships with other stakeholder groups. We are convinced that healthy wolf populations bring not only ecological benefits, but economic benefits as well, and are committed to working toward those ends.



## DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

1130 17th Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036

202-682-9400

[www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org)