

PACIFIC WOLF COALITION

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Conservation Groups Call on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Hold Additional Public Hearings on Gray Wolf Delisting

Pacific Wolf Coalition members seek hearings in Washington, Oregon and California

SEATTLE, *Wash.* — The Pacific Wolf Coalition today called on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to hold multiple public hearings in the three West Coast states on the agency's proposal to remove gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) from the endangered species list. Combined, the coalition represents more than 1 million members and supporters in Washington, Oregon and California. The coalition's appeal comes in response to Fish and Wildlife Service's announcement earlier this month that it would hold only three public hearings nationwide, including just one in the West Coast (in Sacramento, Oct. 2).

"It is unthinkable that the Obama administration is proposing to strip critical protections for gray wolves in places where wolves don't currently exist," said Josh Laughlin, campaign director with Cascadia Wildlands. "It is even more inconceivable that the administration wants to do this without an adequate public process. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must stop and listen to people who live in states where wolves are just starting to recover after being exterminated from the landscape."

Currently, the Fish and Wildlife Service is scheduled to host hearings only in Sacramento, Calif., Albuquerque, N.M., and Washington, D.C. Wolf recovery in the states of Washington and Oregon is in its infancy, and California had its first wolf in nearly 90 years confirmed a little more than a year ago. Wolf recovery in all three of these states would be severely stifled if federal protections are stripped. The Pacific Wolf Coalition is requesting that the agency provide West Coast residents adequate opportunity to be heard on this subject by holding additional hearings in Portland and Ashland, Ore.; Seattle, Wash.; and Los Angeles, Calif.

According to peer-reviewed research, the three West Coast states contain more than 145,000 square miles of unoccupied, prime habitat for wolves. During the past decade, wolves have been naturally dispersing into the Pacific West from populations in the northern Rockies and British Columbia. Federal protections for wolves have already been removed in the eastern third of Oregon and Washington because the area is part of the Northern Rockies "distinct population segment," which was delisted in 2011 by Congressional action. The federal government's current proposal would strip federal protections from the rest of those states and from all of California, removing critical safeguards for recovery of wolves across the entire region.

“Beyond their role as a living symbol of our natural landscape, the wolf is a keystone species. Wolves are critical to maintaining the structure and integrity of native ecosystems,” said Pamela Flick, California representative with Defenders of Wildlife. “Federal protections for wolves are essential to help this species recover and expand into still-suitable parts of its former range, just as the bald eagle was allowed to do before having its federal protections removed.”

Recent regional polling conducted by Tulchin Research shows that more than two of three survey respondents in the West Coast states support wolf recovery. In fact, more than two-thirds of respondents in each state:

- Agree that wolves are a vital part of the America’s wilderness and natural heritage and should be protected in their state (Oregon – 68 percent; Washington – 75 percent; California – 83 percent);
- Agree that wolves play an important role in maintaining deer and elk populations, bringing a healthier balance to ecosystems (Oregon – 69 percent; Washington – 74 percent; California – 73 percent);
- Support restoring wolves to suitable habitat in their states (Oregon – 66 percent; Washington – 71 percent; California – 69 percent);
- And, agree that wolves should continue to be protected under the Endangered Species Act until they are fully recovered (Oregon – 63 percent; Washington – 72 percent; California – 80 percent).

“The science overwhelmingly says that for wolves to fully recover, we need more wolves in more places, and the public overwhelmingly says we need more wolves and less politics,” said Amaroq Weiss, West Coast wolf organizer at the Center for Biological Diversity. “So what does Fish and Wildlife do? It ignores the science and restricts the public’s opportunity to comment. Wolves deserve better, and so does the American public.”

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The Pacific Wolf Coalition represents 34 wildlife conservation, education and protection organizations in California, Oregon and Washington committed to recovering wolves across the region, and includes the following member organizations:

California Wilderness Coalition - California Wolf Center - Cascadia Wildlands - Center for Biological Diversity - Conservation Northwest - Defenders of Wildlife - Earthjustice - Endangered Species Coalition - Environmental Protection Information Center - Gifford Pinchot Task Force -Greenfire Productions - Hells Canyon Preservation Council - Humane Society of the U.S. - Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center - Living with Wolves - Northeast Oregon Ecosystems - National Parks Conservation Association - Natural Resources Defense Council - Northeast Oregon Ecosystems – Oregon Sierra Club Oregon Wild - Predator Defense - Project Coyote - Sierra Club - Sierra Club California - Sierra Club Washington State Chapter - The Larch Company - Western Environmental Law Center - Western Watersheds Project – Wildlands Network - Wolf Haven International