

throughout much of the Midwest the lack of large expanses of unfragmented public land will make it difficult for wolf packs to persist in new areas without causing significant conflicts with agricultural and other human activities.

Because gray wolf recovery in the eastern United States can be achieved by restoring the species to Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, we do not intend to undertake wolf recovery programs in other areas of the Midwest. However, we may provide technical assistance to States and tribes who wish to develop wolf recovery plans beyond those which we have undertaken.

#### *K. Recovery Progress of the Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf*

In 1974, an interagency wolf recovery team was formed, and it completed the Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan in 1980 (Service 1980). The Rocky Mountain Plan focuses wolf recovery efforts on the large contiguous blocks of public land from western Wyoming through Montana to the Canadian border.

The revised Rocky Mountain Recovery Plan (Service 1987) identifies a recovery criterion of 10 breeding pairs of wolves (defined as a male and female capable of reproduction) for 3 consecutive years in each of the 3 recovery areas—(1) northwestern Montana (Glacier National Park; the Great Bear, Bob Marshall, and Lincoln Scapegoat Wilderness Areas; and adjacent public lands), (2) central Idaho (Selway-Bitterroot, Gospel Hump, Frank Church River of No Return, and Sawtooth Wilderness Areas; and adjacent, mostly Federal, lands), and (3) the Yellowstone National Park area (including the Absaroka-Beartooth, North Absaroka, Washakie, and Teton Wilderness Areas; and adjacent public lands). The Plan states that if one of these recovery areas maintains a population of 10 breeding pairs for 3 successive years, wolves in that recovery area can be reclassified to threatened status. If 2 recovery areas maintain 10 breeding pairs (totaling about 200 adult wolves) for 3 successive years, gray wolves across the coverage area of the Rocky Mountain Plan can be reclassified to threatened status. It also states that if all 3 recovery areas maintain 10 breeding pairs for 3 successive years, the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population can be considered as fully recovered and can be delisted. The wolf population would be about 300 adult wolves upon attainment of full recovery. The Plan also recommends that wolves be reintroduced into the Yellowstone

National Park area as an experimental population. Additionally, if natural recovery has not resulted in at least two packs becoming established in central Idaho within 5 years, the Rocky Mountain Plan states that other measures, including reintroduction, would be considered to recover wolves in that area. The goals identified in the Rocky Mountain Plan are intended to ensure a well distributed and viable population in the Rocky Mountains, goals that could be met in a variety of ways while still adhering to the “biological intent” of the recovery plan.

Gray wolf populations were eliminated from Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, as well as adjacent southwestern Canada by the 1930s (Young and Goldman 1944). After human-caused mortality of wolves in southwestern Canada was regulated in the 1960s, populations expanded southward (Carbyn 1983). Dispersing individuals occasionally reached the northern Rocky Mountains of the United States (Ream and Mattson 1982, Nowak 1983), but lacked legal protection there until 1974 when they were listed as endangered.

In 1982, a wolf pack from Canada began to occupy Glacier National Park along the United States-Canada border. In 1986, the first litter of pups documented in over 50 years was born in the Park. In recognition of the ongoing natural recovery of wolves arising from these Canadian dispersers, the Rocky Mountain Plan was revised in 1987 (Service 1987). The revised Rocky Mountain Plan recommends that recovery be focused in areas with large blocks of public land, abundant native ungulates, and minimal livestock. Three recovery areas were identified—northwestern Montana, central Idaho, and the Greater Yellowstone Area. Promotion of natural recovery was advocated for Montana and Idaho (unless no breeding pairs formed in Idaho within 5 years), but recovery in the Yellowstone area was believed to require a reintroduction program.

By 1989, we formed an interagency wolf working group, composed of Federal, State, and tribal agency personnel. The group conducted four basic recovery tasks, in addition to the standard enforcement functions associated with any take of listed species. These tasks were—(1) monitor wolf distribution and numbers, (2) control wolves that attacked livestock by either moving or killing them, (3) research wolves’ relationships to ungulate prey, livestock, and people, and (4) provide accurate information to the public through reports and mass media so that people could develop

their opinions about wolves and wolf management from an informed perspective.

In 1995 and 1996, we reintroduced wolves from southwestern Canada to remote public lands in central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park (Bangs and Fritts 1996, Fritts *et al.* 1997, Bangs *et al.* 1998). We designated these wolves as nonessential experimental populations to increase management flexibility and address local and State concerns (59 FR 60252 and 60266; November 22, 1994). Wolves in northwestern Montana remain listed as endangered, the most protective category under the Act; they are not included within the nonessential experimental population areas. (Refer to the *Currently Designated Nonessential Experimental Populations of Gray Wolves* section above, for additional details.)

The reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in 1995 and 1996 greatly expanded the numbers and distribution of wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains of the United States. Because of the reintroduction, wolves soon became established throughout central Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone Area. In 1995, an estimated 8 breeding pairs (using the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) definition of a male and female successfully raising 2 pups until December 31), within a total population of about 101 individual wolves, produced pups in the northern Rocky Mountains. By 1996, a total population of 152 wolves containing 14 breeding pairs were producing pups. In 1997, 213 wolves with 20 breeding pairs produced pups. In 1998, there were 275 wolves and 21 breeding pairs. In 1999 there were 322 wolves with 24 breeding pairs. December 1999 ended the third successive year in which over 20 wolf breeding pairs successfully produced pups in the northern U.S. Rocky Mountains. In 2000 there were 433 wolves with 30 breeding pairs. As of December 2001 the wolf population was about 563 wolves, with 34 breeding pairs producing pups (Service *et al.* 2002).

The presence of 20 breeding pairs (using the EIS definition of a male and female successfully raising 2 pups) distributed in 3 recovery areas for 3 successive years, exceeded the biological criteria of having 10 breeding pairs (defining as a male and female capable of reproduction) in only 2 recovery areas as recommended in the 1987 recovery plan. For this reason the Service proposed to reclassify the wolf population in the northern Rocky Mountains and adjacent States in July