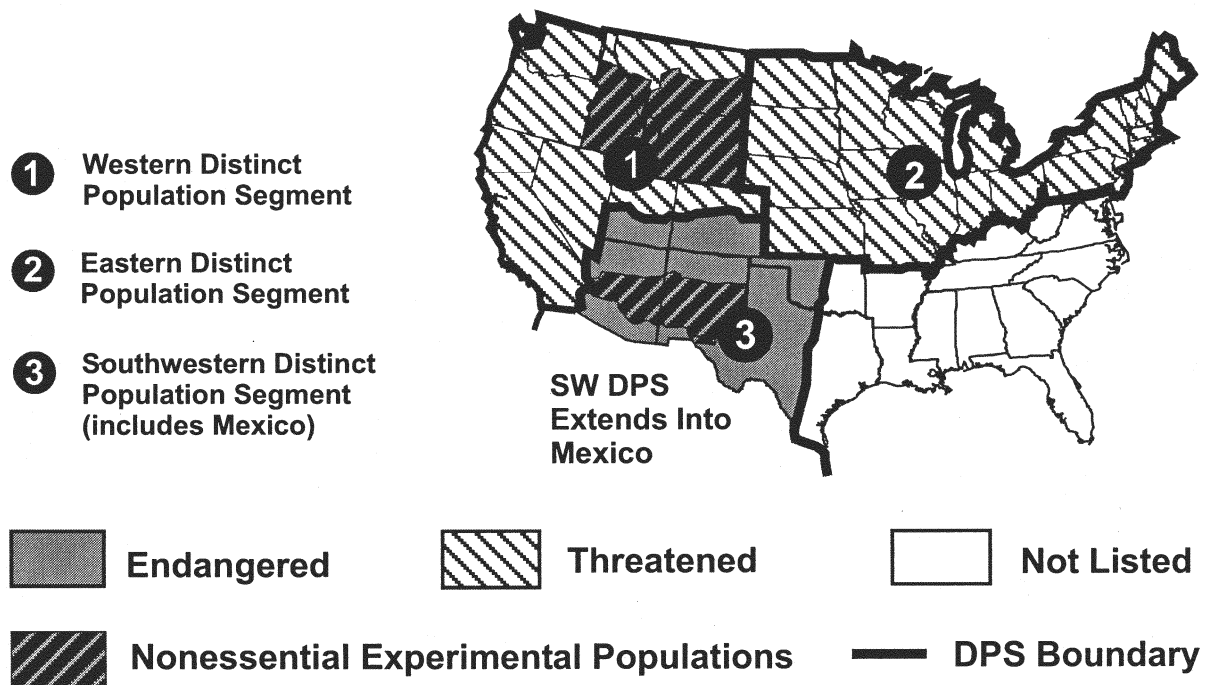


Status of the Gray Wolf in the Continental U.S.



In addition, this ANPR announces our intention to respond to petitions for delisting the gray wolves in the Midwest through this anticipated proposed rulemaking. As stated in the final reclassification rule published today, Mr. Lawrence Krak, of Gilman, Wisconsin, and the Minnesota Conservation Federation have petitioned us to delist gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, and in the Western Great Lakes DPS.

Conservation and Recovery of the Gray Wolf in the Eastern DPS

Understanding the Service's strategy for gray wolf recovery first requires an understanding of the meaning of "recover" and "conserve" under the Act. "Conserve" is defined in the Act itself (section 3(3)) while "recovery" is defined in the Act's implementing regulations at 50 CFR 402.02. Conserve is defined, in part, as "the use of all methods and procedures which are necessary to bring any endangered species or threatened species to the point at which the measures provided pursuant to this Act are no longer necessary." Recovery is defined as "improvement in the status of listed species to the point at which listing is no longer appropriate under the criteria set out in section 4(a)(1) of the Act." Essentially, recover and conserve both mean to bring a species to the point at

which it is no longer threatened or endangered and no longer needs the protections of the Act.

Critical to our analysis of whether a species is ready for delisting is the achievement of the species' recovery goals, the reduction of threats to the species that caused the species to become listed, and the reduction of any new threats that could cause the species to become endangered in the foreseeable future. To determine the appropriate goals for achieving recovery, we rely on a peer-reviewed Recovery Plan. As reported in the final reclassification rule, we believe the revised Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Plan (Service 1992) to be adequate and sufficient to ensure long-term population viability (Peterson *in litt.* 1997). The population goal set within the Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Plan was for a Minnesota wolf population of 1,250–1,400 animals to maintain the gray wolf's genetic diversity over the long-term and provide the resiliency to reduce the adverse impacts of unpredictable chance demographic and environmental events. The Minnesota wolf population currently is estimated to be double that numerical goal (Berg and Benson 1999; Mech 1998; Paul 2001).

In addition, the Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Plan calls for establishing a second population of 100 gray wolves for 5 successive years in the Eastern

United States. As documented in the final reclassification rule, such a second wolf population has developed in Wisconsin and the adjacent Upper Peninsula of Michigan and has exceeded its recovery goal since 1994 (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR) 2002; Wydeven *et al.* 2002; Michigan Department of Natural Resources 2002). Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources preliminarily estimated that about 320 wolves in 70 to 80 packs were in the State in late winter 2001–2002 (WI DNR 2002, Wydeven *et al.* 2002).

As also described in the final reclassification rule, there is no convincing evidence in recent decades of another wild gray wolf population in the United States east of Michigan, so the area in the western Great Lakes States where the wolf currently exists represents the entire range of the species within the Eastern Gray Wolf DPS.

In making a delisting determination, the Service must assess the factors or threats that affect the species as required by section 4 of the Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR part 424). For species that are already listed as threatened or endangered, this analysis of threats is primarily an evaluation of the threats that could potentially affect the species in the foreseeable future following delisting and removal of the Act's protections.