

LOBO WATCH

Sportsmen Taking Charge of Predator Problems

Editorial News/Press Release

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Is Some Wolf Management Better Than No Wolf Management?

On March 18, following disagreement among the more than a dozen environmental organizations which have repeatedly taken the wolf management issue to court, to prevent such management or wolf control from taking place, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the Obama administration had reached an agreement with those groups to settle - and to allow wolf management to begin. Major sportsman based organizations, including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and Big Game Forever, simply saw the agreement as a ploy to stop Congressional legislation aimed at removing the wolf from the protection of the Endangered Species Act - and quickly began to spread that word.

Not all of the groups that had formed the coalition to fight wolf management hunts agreed, and four broke away. Those groups vowed to continue to fight for total wolf protection. However, before the deal between the remaining **"plaintiffs"** and the DOI/USFWS could become official, it had to have U.S. District Court - Missoula judge Donald Molloy's okay. And this past Saturday, April 9, he rejected that deal. His 24-page decision said he did not have the authority to return wolves to Idaho and Montana state management in part because all 13 groups that sued did not agree to the settlement.

Back in Washington D.C., the U.S. Senate has been mulling over a bill (S. 249) which would eliminate Endangered Species Act protection for wolves, in every state of the country. A mirror image bill (H.R. 509) has likewise been introduced in the House of Representatives. Support for those bills was growing, making environmental groups, and probably the USFWS, a bit nervous.

Should these bills be signed into law, federal protection of wolves would be eliminated, and sportsmen who have banded together to fight the environmental groups to put an end to excessive wolf depredation of elk, moose, deer and other game, and to stop the negative impact wolves have on livestock production, say that would financially hurt those pro-wolf organizations. Efforts by "**non-profit**" groups like the Defenders for Wildlife and the Humane Society of the United States, in their "**fight to save wolves**", have been a powerful tool to pull in hundreds of millions in donations from those who still wrongly think of the wolf as the sweet, loving and cuddly fur-ball portrayed by Walt Disney. These sharp, attorney managed organizations have also learned to milk the U.S. Justice system for billions more - through a very abused act known as the Equal Access to Justice Act. American taxpayers have been literally paying these groups to repeatedly file lawsuits against the U.S. Government, for which the organizations are reimbursed their extremely padded legal expenses.

The deal they were trying to cut with DOI/USFWS would have been for a five year period, allowing only Idaho and Montana to manage burgeoning wolf populations - then at the end of that period their abuse of the ESA and the Equal Access to Justice Act would begin all over.

Time was quickly running out for S. 249 and H.R. 509, as Congress was about to shut down - without a lot of business resolved, including the national budget. Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson, working with Montana Senator Jon Tester, managed to get wolf management language included in the continuing resolution that has kept our government at work to come up with an acceptable budget, which is being plucked of billions in fluff as an all out effort is being made to get a handle on excessive government spending. And in that bill there are several seemingly non-related riders, including watered down wolf management. The legislation, which should be signed into law the end of this week, does not give the right to manage wolves in all states, and it does keep wolf management and protection with the federal government.

As worded, this legislation will allow management hunts in Montana and Idaho only, where wolves are currently inflicting the most severe impact on wildlife and livestock. In a number of areas within these two states, wolves have been identified as the leading cause of 70- to 80-percent losses of elk herds, an even greater loss of moose numbers, and dwindling populations of other big game species. Likewise, the depredation of cattle, sheep and other livestock has increased fourfold over the past couple of years. Passage means that wolf management could begin as early as yet this spring, to bring down the excessive numbers of wolves before newborn elk calves are once again annihilated by wolves. In recent years, many herds have seen near "0" calf recruitment, and that has been another major concern. Herds that once averaged 4 years of age are now at 9 years of age. Without the replenishment of young of the year, these herds are growing old - and some cows are now beyond calf bearing years.

Unfortunately, the wolf management, or more appropriately wolf control, that will take place in Montana and Idaho will do nothing to alleviate the same degree of wildlife and livestock loss in a number of other states - namely Wyoming, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. There are now "**at least**" 10,000 wolves roaming the Lower 48, and it is now known that it takes an average of 25 to 30 big game animals yearly to keep each wolf fed. Many biologists who have maintained an objective point of view also acknowledge that wolves kill about as much game just for the fun of killing, often referred to as "**sport killing**". Anyone who does the math will immediately see the need to tightly control wolf numbers. This country is losing between 500,000 and 600,000 elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep, pronghorn and other big game animals to wolves - each and every year. And along with that loss of game have been the loss of hunting opportunities, and the boost hunters bring to local economies.

" This legislation is not what the sportsmen of this country want. But it is a start...and we're ready for much needed control action to begin... immediately! The big game populations of western Montana and most of northern Idaho have fallen deeply into a predator pit situation, and unless wolf numbers are adequately reduced, to allow calf and fawn survival, we are precipitously close to losing a number of once wildlife rich areas - to wolves. More than ever, the sportsmen and honest conservationists of this country now need to pressure Congress to pass S. 249 and H.R. 509, to give every state the right to manage wolves, or other major predators, which are having an

extremely negative impact on other wildlife populations. The wolf must be controlled for what it really is...a devastating predator!" says Toby Bridges, founder of the LOBO WATCH wolf control advocacy group.

Ryan Benson, National Director of Big Game Forever, a relatively new sportsman-based organization that was formed to fight radical environmentalist efforts to push for wolf introduction from coast to coast, said *"While this has been an extremely difficult victory, it is hard to celebrate too much when we know that this bill does not delist most Western and Midwestern states. To our friends in Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, California, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and many other states: We share your frustration that you were not included in this delisting. While it was not our decision to go with a two state bill, the actions of a few made this a self-fulfilling conclusion. We also worked very hard to make sure the bill did not destroy Wyoming's court victory in support of the right of states to make important wildlife management decisions. So while we celebrate the fact that Congress has now recognized that they must act to delist wolves. We know this is not good enough to fix the challenges of unmanaged wolves across the country."*

Many who have battled for the right to control wolf populations are now looking at the current legislation with a somewhat suspicious eye, feeling that the victory may indeed be very shallow - and have little if any affect on still growing wolf numbers. One critic is George Dovel, editor and publisher of "**The Outdoorsman**" - an Idaho based publication. He says the legislation included in the continuing resolution will accomplish little more than "The Deal" that USFWS was ready to cut with the lawsuit wielding environmental groups. According to Dovel, the USFWS delisting plan was based on the willingness of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission to manage for a minimum of 518 wolves...not the 100 as outlined in the original "**Recovery Plan**" and Environmental Impact Statement. He feels that was a major reason for the 2009 delisting in Idaho.

He claims, *"Why should the pro-wolf extremists try to sue to stop this Act of Congress from being implemented? If it is adhered to, our State will continue to be ravaged by wolves and by several destructive diseases that are rapidly spreading to our livestock, our big game herds and, most importantly, to the pets our children fondle and kiss. If it is not adhered to and we kill*

enough wolves to protect our families, our possessions and our livelihoods, wolf advocates can probably get any judge to halt the process because it violates the terms of the delisting agreement that is now being passed by Congress."

What has not been clearly defined to many of those who consider the legislation to be signed this week as a "**victory**", no matter how shallow, has been exactly how any wolves will Montana and Idaho manage for, or the true number of wolves roaming these two states. When it comes to accurate wolf counts, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game honestly have absolutely no idea how many wolves are out there. Nor do they have the technology and expertise to determine such. Recently, MT FWP upped their "**at least**" estimation from "**524**" to "**566**". However, when planning last year's management hunt (nixed by Judge Molloy), this agency claimed that the chosen quota of 186 wolves would represent a "**13-percent**" reduction of the state's wolf population. That would mean they acknowledged some 1,430 wolves in Montana alone. There is a huge discrepancy between these two numbers.

Given a "**normal**" annual reproduction rate of 25- to 30-percent, that would mean come late spring there would be quite a few more wolves on the landscape. Allowing for, say 200 wolves dying of natural causes or eliminated as "**problem wolves**", the probable population would be between 1,600 and 1,650 wolves - in Montana alone. And that's nearly as many wolves as what the USFWS and state game departments in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming have been touting as the entire wolf population of the Northern Rockies.

Before there's any talk of reducing wolf populations by any given percentage, these agencies will have to stop guessing, and find a more accurate way of assessing wolf populations. Even if that's accomplished, these agencies are not going to reverse wolf damage with measly harvests of 15- to 20-percent. The environmental groups which have fought wolf control have long cried that wolf management was not being based on "**proven science**". They're sure to not like the proven science of reducing wolf numbers to the point where other wildlife species can climb out of a predator pit situation. Just to stop further decline of a prey base (elk, moose, deer, etc.) requires the removal of upwards of 50-percent of the existing wolf population. To reduce wolf depredation to where big game herds can once again begin to grow will mean

eliminating 70- to 80-percent of all wolves - and to maintain that level for five or six years.

Forcing state wildlife agencies to adhere to this "**science**" will continue to be a major battle. If we can't, then with each new year there will be fewer and fewer big game animals in Montana and Idaho. And in those states which have been denied the right to conduct wolf control, wolf populations will begin to skyrocket...and big game populations will plummet...and when there's not enough game, livestock depredation will escalate. Wolves will then also begin to spread into neighboring states - just the way the pro-wolf environmental groups have planned it all along.

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LOBO WATCH Encourages All Hunters, All Outdoor Enthusiasts, All True Wildlife Conservationists To Turn Up The Heat On Congress To Pass S.249 And H.R. 509 - Or Any Other Similar Bills. To Save Wildlife In America, We Must Stop The Spread Of The Wolf...And Stop The Destructive Agenda Of Environmental Organizations!

For More About LOBO WATCH Go To: www.lobowatch.com

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