

Partial Delisting of Wolves Part of FY 2011 Budget Agreement in U.S. Congress

April 12, 2011 (Washington, DC) - A coalition of the nation's largest hunting and conservation organizations welcomed a provision championed by Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC) member Rep. Mike Simpson of Idaho and CSC Senate Co-Chair, Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, to remove the gray wolf from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as part of a the FY 2011 budget agreement to fund the federal government through the end of the fiscal year.

The coalition includes Safari Club International, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, National Rifle Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wild Sheep Foundation, the Boone and Crockett Club, and Pope and Young Club.

The groups support this initial step toward state management of recovered wolves and the clear assertion by Congress that recovered wildlife should be delisted from the ESA. The groups also note that other states have recovered wolf populations that have not yet been delisted and urge Congress to actively pursue delisting for those states also.

The Simpson-Tester rider directs the Secretary of the Interior to reissue the latest (2009) ruling declaring the wolf recovered and to return wolf management to state agencies in Montana and Idaho, as well as portions of Utah, Washington and Oregon. Additionally, the provision precludes further lawsuits and preserves the decision made by Wyoming U.S. District Judge Johnson in November 2010, that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) wrongfully rejected Wyoming's wolf management plan.

"This agreement is only the first step in returning management of the gray wolf back to state authority where it belongs," said Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation President Jeff Crane. "Thanks to the leadership of the bipartisan Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, a concrete move towards delisting has been taken and certain states will once again have the authority to manage wolves in the near future."

Dr. Larry Rudolph, President of Safari Club International, said "We are pleased that the work of this important coalition has yielded a historical precedent from the Congress to cut off the endless litigation and return recovered populations of wolves to state management."

"Federal management goals were met for all wolf populations at least 10 years ago and wolves now number at least five times over the federal goals. Federal officials at the USFWS have attempted delisting three times in the Rockies and Great Lakes and - despite the clear achievement of recovery - each attempt was turned back to the USFWS on questions of process.

This fix is long overdue and we applaud it,” said David Allen, CEO of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

The coalition noted that the Congressional mandate applies to only a part of the area where wolves are beyond recovery goals. Wyoming’s wolves remain under federal ESA protection. Only parts of Washington, Oregon, and Utah are included in the delisting although wolves are moving into other parts of those states. The Western Great Lakes area is excluded from the provision, where a fourth round of rulemaking is expected to begin soon.

Chris Cox, Executive Director of the National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action, said, “We are pleased with this important step and hope that opponents of delisting have gotten the message that Congress is sending. We will be closely watching the pending delisting in the Western Great Lakes. In the meantime, we will continue to push for a comprehensive solution in Congress.”

“It is unwise to try the same thing over and over again and expect a different result,” said Gray Thornton, CEO of the Wild Sheep Foundation. “We’ve seen three times already that this process is unclear and causes – as Judge Molloy described it – ‘turmoil of legal issues with practical management issues’. This is a problem only Congress can fix. Congress has now fixed part of the Rockies and the Northwest. Turmoil will continue until Congress completes the job in the Rockies, including Wyoming, the Northwest and the Great Lakes region – and anywhere else where wolf populations are recovered.”

The wolf delisting agreement in the FY 2011 budget came on the heels of Montana U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy ruling against a settlement proposal by environmental groups that would have returned wolf management temporarily to Idaho and Montana only.

In order to return all recovered wolf populations to state managers, the group supports further efforts in Congress and the Administration until a comprehensive fix is complete.

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