

December 2011 North American Wolf News

Washington

Early in December, the Washington state Fish and Wildlife Commission approved a management plan. To quote myself from the November e-mail:

It is the controversial culmination of four years of hard work on the part of state biologists, stakeholders representing a wide variety of interests and policy makers. As is the case with wolf policy at all levels, while the intent was to use “the best available science” as the basis for management decisions, the strong feelings many citizens and policy makers have for our most controversial species is likely to have an impact on the final management plan.

The final version resembles the final draft crafted by department biologists but some changes have been made. The final plan is due to be released in mid-January. The state plan is applicable in places where wolves are not listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) – right now, in about the eastern one-third of the state.

The state just released the results of its 2011 wolf survey. Our state now has 27 wolves in 5 confirmed wolf packs. Three of those packs qualify as breeding pairs which are defined as an adult male and female with at least two pups that survive until the end of the year. The number of breeding pairs is a closely watched figure as it determines Washington’s wolves legal status i.e. whether they are endangered, threatened, etc. under state law. Once there are 15 breeding pairs for a certain amount of time, the Washington wolf population will be eligible for state delisting.

It’s shaping up to be a busy year for legislation effecting wolves in Washington state this year. Stay tuned.

Oregon

This is the time of year for wildlife agencies to count their wolves. Oregon came up with 4 confirmed packs as well as some individual wolves for a total of at least 23 wolves. Only one pack, however, is considered a breeding pair – the Walla Walla pack, which probably spends time in Washington as well.

Of course the most talked about Oregon wolf is no longer just an Oregon wolf. When the young male wolf known as OR-7, whose movements are closely tracked via his GPS collar, crossed the California border, he became a part of history and dramatically increased the media attention he had been receiving. The conversation in the California press was much the same as it has been in other states that are new to wolf recovery – some celebration but also predictions of the end of the local ungulate populations and ranching as we know it.

OR-7 has also been renamed. In a contest sponsored by an Oregon conservation organization, the name “Journey” won the most support. As of January 4, Journey was in Shasta County in N. California, causing healthy debate while remaining blissfully unaware that the last wild wolf in California died almost 100 years ago.

Great Lakes Region

For the third time in recent history, federal Endangered Species Act protections for wolves in the Great Lakes states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan have been removed. The Great Lakes wolf population will officially be under the states' management starting January 27. There are roughly 3000 wolves in Minnesota, about 800 in Wisconsin and around 700 on the upper peninsula of Michigan. Both of the last two attempts at delisting were over-turned by law suits.

Rockies

Wolf hunting and trapping continues in the Rockies states of Idaho and Montana. As of January 5, 177 wolves have been killed by hunters in Idaho as well as 30 by trapping. For most of Idaho, hunting and trapping will be over for the season on March 31. In regions where the state feels the wolf population needs to be reduced, hunting will continue through the end of June.

124 wolves have been killed by hunters in Montana so far this season. Montana's season has been extended to February 15. Trapping is not allowed in Montana.

USFWS's proposal to delist Wyoming wolves is open for comment until January 13.

A RECAP OF THE LATEST STATUS:

Until January 27th, gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) are considered endangered under federal law in all contiguous states except for Idaho, Montana, portions of Washington, Oregon and Utah. In Minnesota they are considered threatened.

STARTING January 27th, gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) are considered endangered under federal law in all contiguous states except for Idaho, Montana, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin and portions of some states surrounding those core populations including: Washington, Oregon, Utah, N. and S. Dakota, Illinois, Iowa and miniscule portions of Nebraska, Indiana and Ohio.

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