

**Animal Welfare Institute * Born Free USA * Center for Biological Diversity * CREDO Action
* Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice * Endangered Species Coalition
Humane Society Legislative Fund * International Fund for Animal Welfare * League of
Conservation Voters * Natural Resources Defense Council * Sierra Club *
The Humane Society of the United States * Western Watersheds Project * WildEarth
Guardians**

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**1.8 Million Americans Speak Out Against Stripping Federal Protections from Wolves
*Federal Proposal Would Halt Wolf Recovery, Allow More Wolf Killing***

WASHINGTON, DC— Almost two million Americans stated their opposition to the Trump administration’s proposal to strip endangered species protections from gray wolves in a comment period that closed today. This is one of the largest numbers of comments ever submitted on a federal decision involving endangered species and reflects broad dissatisfaction with the Trump administration’s politically driven move to turn wolf management over to state agencies across most of the lower 48 states.

In addition to the 1.8 million comments submitted by the public, 86 members of Congress (House and Senate letters), 100 scientists , 230 businesses , and 367 veterinary professionals all submitted letters to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service opposing the wolf delisting plan. Even the scientific peer reviews written at the behest of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s state that the agency’s proposal contains numerous errors and appears to come to a predetermined conclusion, not even supported by its own science, to remove federal protections for wolves.

“The incredible volume of comments give voice to a sad fact: the delisting proposal is a radical departure from the optimism and courage we need to promote endangered species recovery in this country. The comments show that Americans believe the Fish and Wildlife Service’s proposal falls well short of the conservation ideals this country stood for 45 years ago when the Endangered Species Act was signed,” said Defenders of Wildlife President Jamie Rappaport Clark.

“The restoration of the gray wolf could be one of the great American wildlife conservation success stories if Secretary Bernhardt would just finish the job,” Leda Huta, executive director of the Endangered Species Coalition said.

“The Fish and Wildlife Service is snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Instead of restoring wolves to their rightful places in prime wilderness around the country -- as it did for bald eagles -- the agency wants to abandon wolf recovery before the job is done,” said Drew Caputo, Earthjustice Vice President of Litigation for Lands, Wildlife, Oceans. “Today 1.8 million people in America told the Trump Administration to go back to work and protect our wolves.”

Scientists estimate that there were once hundreds of thousands of wolves in the lower 48 states, but the animals had been driven to near-extinction by the early 1900s. After passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973 and subsequent federal protection of the wolf, federal recovery programs resulted in the rebound of wolf populations in limited parts of the country. Today roughly 5,500 wolves currently live in the continental United States -- a fraction of the species' historic numbers.

The Trump administration's proposal would remove existing protections for gray wolves everywhere in the lower 48 states except Arizona and New Mexico, where the Mexican wolf is struggling to survive with an estimated population of just 131 wolves. This proposal would abandon protections for wolves in places where wolf recovery is just in its infancy, such as California, Oregon and Washington, and would prevent wolves from recovering in other places where good wolf habitat has been identified, including the southern Rocky Mountains and the Northeast.

"By delisting the gray wolf, Secretary Bernhardt is providing a massive giveaway to the oil and gas industry he once lobbied for," said Josh Nelson, Co-Director of CREDO Action. "Big Oil has spent years lobbying against ESA protections and sees gray wolves -- as well as the entire ESA -- as a huge barrier in its pursuit to exploit natural resources and increase profits. If Bernhardt's extinction plan is enacted, it would be a death sentence for the gray wolf."

“Trump cannot ignore almost two million voices calling for the protection of wolves,” said Sylvia Fallon, Senior Director of the Nature Program for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). “Science should determine how species are protected, not politics or special interests,” Fallon added. “Wolves need continued protections to recover and the American public agrees.”

Nicole Paquette, chief programs and policy officer for the Humane Society of the United States said: “Anti-wolf sentiments nearly led to the extermination of America's wolves, and just when populations are starting to bounce back, the federal government is considering a plan that could place them in jeopardy. Rather than catering to interests from trophy hunters and fear mongering, we hope the federal government rejects this proposal and works toward the recovery of this species.”

“American wolves deserve better than the FWS’s reckless delisting proposal,” said Sara Amundson, president of the Humane Society Legislative Fund. “As an apex predator and keystone species, these national icons provide innumerable ecological benefits and are vital for local economies that rely on wolf-watching tourism.”

"Americans are outraged and hundreds of thousands are saying it loudly and clearly; the job of wolf recovery is not done," said John Horning, executive director of WildEarth Guardians. "The Fish and Wildlife Service is not only wrong on the science of wolf recovery but also wildly out of step with the desires of most Americans who want to see federal protections for wolves maintained."

“The American public has overwhelmingly weighed in: We must not prematurely delist wolves, but instead give them the time they need to truly and fully recover," said Lena Moffit, director of the Sierra Club’s Our Wild America campaign. “Secretary Bernhardt must abandon plans to remove vital protections for still-recovering gray wolves, which remain absent from much of their historic range. Instead of persecuting wolves, we should put more effort into coexistence and appreciate the critical role wolves play in maintaining the natural balance.”

“This attempt to eliminate crucial protections for gray wolves demonstrates an anti-predator bias that continues to influence wolf management decisions. The undeserved hostility toward wolves is not based on principles of sound scientific management. These apex predators play a vital role in ecosystems, contribute to a multibillion-dollar outdoor tourism industry, and are an iconic symbol of our beloved native wildlife,” said Cathy Liss, president of the Animal Welfare Institute

“Removing protections for an at-risk species like the gray wolf would be yet another in a long line of harmful policies by the most anti-environment administration in history,” said Alex Taurel, Conservation Program Director at the League of Conservation Voters. “President Trump and Secretary Bernhardt should stop doing favors like this for the oil and gas industry and instead protect our public lands and endangered species for the benefit of the people of this country.”

According to Angela Grimes, CEO of Born Free USA, “The American people have firmly rebuked the Trump administration’s attempt to remove critical federal protections from the gray wolf, flooding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with a record 1.8 million public comments. We urge the agency to give full consideration to this incredibly strong response, as well as to the best available science, which concludes that this keystone species has not yet fully recovered and merits further protection under the Endangered Species Act.”

“From California and Nevada to Colorado, vast stretches of public land are perfectly suited to wolf recovery, yet the howl of the wolf remains tragically absent from most of the West,” Erik Molvar, a wildlife biologist and executive director with Western Watersheds Project, said. “The nationwide de-listing rule represents an extinction plan on behalf of a handful of public land

profiteers, at the expense of restoring healthy native ecosystems that will benefit all Americans.”