
MEASURES OF SUCCESS: A SNAPSHOT OF THE MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM IN 2009

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Montana's gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) population continues to be secure, while the political and legal environments remain dynamic. Wolf delisting is a two-step process. Biological recovery criteria must be met and clearly demonstrated, along with an adequate regulatory framework. Secondly, the delisting decision must be upheld during inevitable legal challenges. The northern Rockies wolf population has met or exceeded numeric and connectivity requirements for many years. The northern Rockies gray wolf population was initially delisted in 2008, but a legal challenge reinstated federal legal protections under the Endangered Species Act mid-summer. By the end of 2008, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

estimated a minimum of 497 wolves in 84 verified packs, 34 of which met the definition of breeding pair. Federal delisting efforts resumed early in 2009 and took effect throughout Montana on 4 May. The second delisting decision was challenged again in Federal Court, although a preliminary injunction request to reinstate federal protections was denied in September. With delisting in Montana, the wolf was automatically reclassified as a species in need of management. Montana's laws, administrative rules, and management plan also took effect. Montana Tribes lead wolf management activities on their respective reservations. The first fair chase wolf hunting season in Montana occurred in 2009. Seventy-two wolves were harvested through a quota-based framework. Wolves and their management continue to be controversial to a diversity of publics for a wide variety of reasons. Nonetheless, Montana's wolf program has a solid regulatory foundation and the population is biologically sound. This presentation will provide an update on a variety of topics.