

**Earthjustice • Defenders of Wildlife •
Natural Resources Defense Council • Sierra Club •
Center for Biological Diversity • The Humane Society of the
United States • Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance •
Friends of the Clearwater • Alliance for the Wild Rockies •
Oregon Wild • Cascadia Wildlands •
Western Watersheds Project • Wildlands Network •
Hells Canyon Preservation Council**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 20, 2009

CONTACT: Jenny Harbine, Earthjustice, (406) 586-9699
Suzanne Asha Stone, Defenders of Wildlife, (208) 861-4655
Louisa Willcox, Natural Resources Defense Council, (406) 222-9561
Melanie Stein, Sierra Club, (307) 733-4557
Michael Robinson, Center for Biological Diversity, (575) 534-0360

Conservation Groups Challenge Wolf Hunting

Missoula, MT— Conservation groups today asked a federal district court to block fall wolf hunts in Idaho and Montana. The request came in an ongoing lawsuit seeking to restore federal Endangered Species Act protections to wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains until wolf numbers are stronger, the states develop an adequate legal safety net, and connectivity between recovery areas is assured.

Idaho has authorized the intentional killing of 255 wolves in a wolf hunt, scheduled to begin September 1. The authorized wolf killing via hunting in Idaho represents 30 percent of the last reported Idaho wolf population estimate, which was 846 wolves at the end of December 2008. Montana has authorized the intentional killing of 75 wolves in a wolf hunt, scheduled to begin September 15. Montana has authorized the killing of 15 percent of its last official wolf population estimate, which was 497 wolves at the end of December 2008. There were only 39 breeding pairs in Idaho last year, and just 34 in Montana.

The wolf hunting is in addition to wolf killing due to livestock conflicts, defense-of-property wolf killing, and natural mortality. The hunting would occur throughout the states, including in core wilderness regions where wolves have virtually no conflicts with human activities. Idaho and Montana currently have no cap on wolf killing. For example, under Idaho law, there is no limit on wolf killing in defense of livestock. The combined loss of all these wolves threatens the recovery of the still-vulnerable regional wolf population in the northern Rockies.

Under the challenged U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wolf delisting rule, Idaho and Montana are free to reduce the wolf population down to 150 per state – a potential loss of roughly two-thirds of the region's wolves.

The scheduled wolf hunts would cripple the regional wolf population by isolating wolves into disconnected subgroups incapable of genetic or ecological sustainability. The wolf hunts would

also allow the killing of the breeding “alpha” male and female wolves, thereby disrupting the social group, leaving pups more vulnerable.

No other endangered species has ever been delisted at such a low population level and then immediately hunted to even lower unsustainable levels.

The decision to hunt wolves comes as Yellowstone National Park wolves declined by 27 percent last year – one of the largest declines reported since wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone in 1995. The northern Rockies wolf population also has not achieved a level of connectivity between the greater Yellowstone, central Idaho, and northwest Montana areas that is essential to wolves’ long-term survival.

Wolves are still under federal protection in Wyoming because a federal court previously ruled that Wyoming’s hostile wolf management scheme leaves wolves in “serious jeopardy.” The Fish and Wildlife Service in the recent past held that a state-by-state approach to delisting wolves was not permitted under the Endangered Species Act, but the federal government flip flopped on its earlier position and this year took wolves in Idaho and Montana off the endangered species list while leaving those in Wyoming on the list.

In addition to Wyoming, the states of Idaho and Montana have refused to make enforceable commitments to maintain viable wolf populations within their borders.

Earthjustice represents Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity, The Humane Society of the United States, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Friends of the Clearwater, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands, Western Watersheds Project, Wildlands Network, and Hells Canyon Preservation Council.

#####

“Wolves need to be managed, but in a responsible way that allows for a healthy wolf population while reducing conflicts, rather than aggravating them. The bottom line is that the federal delisting and state management plans don’t provide for a sustainable wolf population in the Northern Rockies, and wolves should not be hunted at this time - particularly not at the unsustainable levels that have been announced for this fall.” *Suzanne Stone, Northern Rockies representative for Defenders of Wildlife*

"At a point when we are so close to having a truly restored wolf population, the State of Idaho is going to issue an unlimited number of wolf tags to eliminate 30 percent of the State’s wolf population," says *Louisa Willcox, Senior Wildlife Advocate for the Natural Resource Defense Council.*" As a top predator, these creatures are vital to the health of the northern Rockies ecosystem, but many of the ecological improvements that we’ve seen as a result of their reintroduction to the region will be imperiled by the Idaho and Montana hunts. While we are not against hunting, we are against conducting them prematurely, and in such a reckless and counterproductive manner."

“The chance for wild wolves to return to their native habitat in Oregon from the Rockies, through the Blue Mountains, and onto the Cascades will be slim to none under this proposed “management” approach. These potential reductions to the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population threaten to negate the level of recovery that has been achieved over the past decade and will be a major setback for restoring regional connectivity and a sustainable wolf population over the long-term.” *Jennifer Schwartz, Staff Attorney/ Campaign Director for Hells Canyon Preservation Council*

"The state of Idaho's eagerness to substantially reduce the wolf population in the backcountry bleeds through in its 2009 hunting regulations. The infamous Lolo Unit wolf killing proposal again rears its ugly head in these regulations as a seven month (Sept. 1- Mar 31) long season, allowing hunting pressure when the gray wolf is most sensitive." *Will Boyd, Education Director, Friends of the Clearwater*

“The recent announcements by the states of Idaho and Montana to institute hunts to significantly reduce the population of gray wolves in the Northern Rockies makes clear that the federal government’s decision to turn management of wolves over to these states is premature, and unlikely to ensure their survival,” said *Jonathan Lovvorn*, vice president and chief counsel for animal protection litigation with *The Humane Society of the United States*. “The federal government’s efforts to strip wolves of all federal protection have been repeatedly struck down by the courts, and this latest rule is no more likely to succeed than the previous failed attempts.”

"A hunt in Idaho and Montana will mean even fewer wolves will survive to reach Yellowstone," said *Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity*, "and that will further isolate the Yellowstone wolves and hasten genetic problems that scientists say will lower pup survival in coming years."

“It is too soon to begin hunting wolves in the northern Rockies. When other species have been removed from the endangered species list, state management has progressed slowly and cautiously in order to ensure sustainable and healthy population levels. Aggressive hunting plans in Idaho and Montana will dramatically reduce gray wolf populations and jeopardize the future of gray wolves in the northern Rockies.” *Melanie Stein, Associate Regional Representative, Sierra Club*

“Wolf hunting is premature,” said *Doug Honnold of Earthjustice*, who represents the conservation groups in the wolf delisting lawsuit. “The states haven’t demonstrated that they are ready to achieve and maintain legitimate wolf recovery. We will work to stop this indiscriminate wolf killing.”