**IMPERILED SPECIES FACT SHEET: GRAY WOLF**

**April 28, 2016**

The gray wolf is an iconic emblem of freedom, the great outdoors, and the spirit of the American wilderness. Wolves drive tourism and economic gains while promoting and sustaining healthy ecosystems. Unfortunately, centuries of trapping, hunting, and poisoning brought wolves in the lower 48 states to the brink of extinction. In 1978, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed gray wolves in the lower 48 states as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), except in Minnesota where the gray wolf was listed as threatened. Since then, the FWS has used a piecemeal approach to try to delist different populations of gray wolves in the lower 48 states. However, these attempts have been found illegal under the ESA and overturned in federal courts.

**AMERICANS CARE ABOUT WOLVES:** Studies and voting records show that Americans want wolves conserved for their children and their children’s children. In November 2014, Michigan voters rejected two proposals which would designate wolves a game species and subject them to trophy hunting by 55% and 64% of the vote. A 2015 survey of 9,000 mostly rural Wisconsin residents found that 65% of those living in wolf ranges want the wolf population maintained or increased. In the past few years, millions of people have called on FWS to maintain federal protections to conserve wolves. Removing federal protections for wolves goes against what American people have demanded, time and time again.

**WOLVES DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH:** Local economies and small businesses are supported by tourists who flock to wolf habitats for a glimpse of wolves or to hear their multi-pitched songs. A 2006 study of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming found that wolf presence in the Yellowstone ecosystem created a $35.5 million annual revenue stream. One outdoor educator estimates that wolf watching brings in four times more money than hunting.

**WOLVES ARE NOT A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO LIVESTOCK:** More than 99% of unwanted livestock losses come from disease; injury; theft; and weather events, such as snow, fire, or lightning. U.S. Department of Agriculture data show wolves (and all other carnivores combined, including coyotes, domestic dogs and cougars) cause less than 1% of all annual livestock losses. Additionally, a 25-year study from the University of Washington published in 2014 found that killing wolves actually increased livestock losses due to wolves in the following year. Researchers think this is because killing an alpha wolf can cause the family unit to break up, creating more breeding pairs and more pups to feed. Nonlethal methods such as fence flagging, ridge riders and carcass removal are proven ways to decrease livestock losses.

**WOLVES BALANCE ECOSYSTEMS:** Beyond its role as a living symbol of our natural landscape, the wolf is a keystone species. Its presence is critical to maintaining the structure and integrity of its native ecosystems. The return of wolves to Yellowstone National Park has forced once-sedentary elk herds to move and biologists have documented resulting ecosystem changes and enormous benefits for other species, from amphibians to fish, songbirds, moose, pronghorn, and lynx. Moreover, browsing elk no longer suppress aspen, cottonwood, and willow, allowing vital river ecosystems to be restored. In food webs, the numbers of prey determine the number of predators. Studies show hunters have far greater effects on ungulate (e.g., deer, elk, and moose) populations than wolves. In fact, wolves take the oldest and weakest animals, improving the health of the herd.

**CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS:** In recent years there have been numerous standalone bills introduced in both chambers, as well as riders on appropriation bills, that would legislatively delist different populations of gray wolves and in some cases prevent judicial review of those delistings. In fact, in 2011 an appropriations rider was enacted that delisted wolves in Idaho and Montana – marking the first time in history that Congress delisted a species from the ESA. That 2011 wolf rider exposed wolves in the northern Rockies region to increasingly hostile state management practices – particularly in Idaho – and kicked off a significant uptick in congressional bills and riders that undermine or block ESA protections for particular species. In the 114th Congress a rider to delist wolves in Wyoming and three Midwest states (Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) was included in FY 2016 Interior/EPA appropriations bills in both the House and Senate. Fortunately that Wyoming/Midwest wolf rider was not included in the December 2015 appropriations omnibus.