

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 26, 2011

The Honorable Dan Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Ashe,

We write to offer our support for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposed rule to delist the gray wolf in Wisconsin and the Western Great Lakes from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and to express concern with the comment period FWS has reopened on reclassifying the gray wolf in the eastern United States as a new species.


Currently, Wisconsin has more wolves than any state other than Alaska and Minnesota. In fact, current population estimates range from 782 to 824 wolves, far exceeding both the Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan goal of 350 and the federal recovery goal of 100. The gray wolf population has improved in our state beyond multiple recovery standards, and is a remarkable success story of endangered species management.

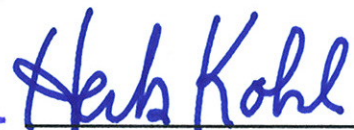
The population of gray wolves in Wisconsin is robust, but the natural habitat of wolves is shrinking. The product of these competing forces is increasing contact between wolves and humans. As a result, wolves are a constant threat to the livestock of ranchers and farmers and too many peoples' pets. Last year in Wisconsin, 47 farms lost at least 75 livestock animals and saw injuries to six more. Due to the remarkable recovery of the gray wolf, and the increasing hazard wolves are placing on Wisconsinites, we believe the gray wolf should be delisted from the ESA. Once the wolf is delisted, Wisconsin has a management plan that the FWS has reviewed and determined that if implemented successfully, will succeed in maintaining a viable wolf population.

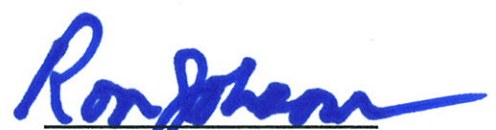
In addition, we believe that the FWS should suspend its status review of the "Eastern wolf" from its efforts to delist the gray wolf in Wisconsin. Clouding the delisting process by recognizing two physically indistinguishable species of wolves in Wisconsin is not scientifically defensible. First, the existence of the "Eastern wolf" as a separate species is not completely supported by the scientific community. In fact, the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, which provides Federal agencies with scientifically credible taxonomic information, does not differentiate the "Eastern wolf" from the gray wolf. Additionally, even if the eastern wolf lives as a separate species with the gray wolf in the same habitat, because of genetic mingling between the two species, there is no way to determine the pure gray wolf population or make a case for speciation.

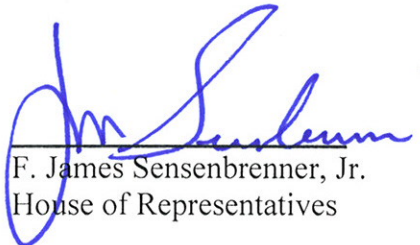
The Endangered Species Act exists to protect critically imperiled species and works to return threatened populations to an ecologically sustainable size. The recovery of the gray wolf in Wisconsin is a success story, and the burgeoning wolf population no longer needs Federal endangered status. To split the species based on mixed genetic ancestry is not scientifically sound and reduces the significance of their recovery. The Great Lakes wolves behave, act, and mate as one species on the landscape. Therefore, the whole population should be managed as a single species, and we advocate that the FWS delist them as such. We believe through proper state management, Wisconsin can balance the preservation of an iconic species and ensure the well-being of Wisconsinites.

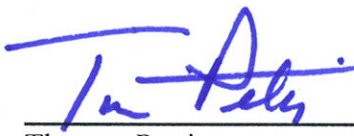
Sincerely,


Tammy Baldwin
House of Representatives

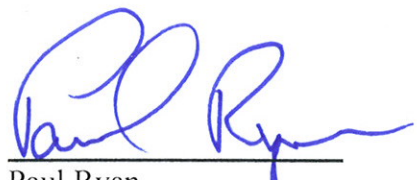

Herb Kohl
U.S. Senate



Ron Johnson
U.S. Senate



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House of Representatives


Thomas Petri
House of Representatives


Ron Kind
House of Representatives


Paul Ryan
House of Representatives


Sean Duffy
House of Representatives


Reid Ribble
House of Representatives

Cc: Ken Salazar, Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior
Scott Walker, Governor, Wisconsin