



## Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Testimony to USFWS regarding designation of gray wolf DPS and proposal to delist the DPS.

**March 7, 2007**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife supports the establishment of a distinct population segment (DPS) of the gray wolf in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM). We also support the proposal to remove the gray wolf from the list of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife within the NRM DPS.

However, we would like to comment and seek resolution to three primary concerns raised by the federal delisting proposal as follows; 1) proposed DPS boundary, and 2) Oregon's authority to manage wolves outside the DPS boundary, and 3) state funding for wolf management.

### **1. DPS boundary**

In 2005 the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan). As part of that plan wolf management areas were established for eastern and western Oregon. This assumed that wolf conservation objectives would be reached first in eastern Oregon and state delisting could occur while ensuring continued protections in western Oregon. The boundary between eastern and western Oregon was chosen by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission as Hwy 97/20/395 and extends through the heart of central Oregon (figure 1). It separates the predicted suitable habitat between the Blue Mountain ecoregion and the Oregon Cascades.

The Department offers the following discussion points regarding the proposed DPS boundary (Hwy 395/78/95) chosen by the FWS.

A. There is strong evidence that active wolf packs occur on or near the Oregon border in the Cold Springs and Oxbow areas. The 180 mile dispersal criteria used by the Service extends well beyond the proposed federal DPS boundary in Oregon's Blue Mountains and wolves from these packs could easily move beyond the proposed boundary. In addition, the Service-proposed DPS boundary bisects contiguous potential wolf habitat and large federal and private ownerships which creates confusing and difficult management situations.

B. The proposed DPS boundary does not align with the boundaries established by Oregon's Wolf Plan. Consequently under the federal proposal it will be very difficult for the state to manage wolves as outlined under the state plan. In the future, the proposed DPS would create a third regulatory segment in Oregon for the purpose of protecting wolves. In effect, Oregon wolf population objectives could be met in eastern Oregon and state delisting could occur, but with continued federal listed status over much of eastern Oregon, all management options would not be possible. We believe this unnecessarily creates confusion among landowners, the public, and agencies.

C. Two of the three previously confirmed wolves in Oregon were located on or near the proposed DPS boundary. This indicates a propensity for wolves to easily travel that distance from Idaho and also makes probable that further travels would be expected.

D. The Department believes that wolves which occupy any portion of the eastern Oregon Wolf Management Area as defined by the Oregon Wolf Plan are genetically and spatially connected to Idaho wolves.

E. The proposed DPS boundary is an artificial boundary – a highway. We understand that this is clearly allowed by federal DPS policy. Therefore, the Department’s proposed DPS line should be considered under the same policy.

F. Extending the DPS line to match Oregon’s line will leave a variable expanse of unsuitable habitat between the Blue Mtn. ecoregion (wolf habitat) and the new line. We believe this is consistent with what has been proposed in the states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and represents the same degree of “marked separation”. We ask that the Service apply DPS policy consistently among all states involved.

## **2. Authority for Oregon to manage wolves outside of DPS boundary**

The Department is concerned with our lack of legal authority to manage listed wolves outside the DPS boundary since they would remain federally listed under this proposal. We have applied for a Section 10(a)(1)(A) permit which would allow Oregon officials to use lethal control of wolves in certain chronic depredation situations, but almost a year later have received no official word on the status of our application. Furthermore, the Federal Register solicits comments regarding the intention to use Section 6 agreements to authorize states with approved management plans to assume lethal control responsibilities. However, the Service gives no details as to how and if this actually might take place. We are concerned that pursuing this approach may have unforeseen legal and financial consequences to existing agreements.

The Department believes that the Oregon Wolf Plan provides adequate conservation measures for gray wolves in the near term while at the same time lays out a strong management framework that will guide management of Oregon wolves into the future. We support federal mechanisms which allow Oregon to fully manage wolves but remain concerned about how this would be applied and if it would actually happen as part of delisting.

## **3. Funding**

The Department remains concerned about the lack of secure federal funding for wolves in Oregon. We are currently operating our wolf management program under SWG funding, but understand that SWG funding may not be available for wolf management into the future. The State of Oregon accepted the responsibility of wolves in Oregon when it developed and adopted the Oregon Wolf Plan and we request the Service consider all avenues to assist funding Oregon’s developing program. We expect wolves to re-colonize Oregon in the near future and wish to make clear that both the Department and USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services remain seriously under-funded to adequately address future wolf management and depredation issues.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Figure 1.

