

Threatened and Endangered Species

United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Montana

GRAY WOLF *Canis lupus*



OFFICIAL STATUS: Endangered. Endangered species are species that are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. It is unlawful to kill, harm, or harass endangered species.

LISTED: 43 Federal Register 9612; March 9, 1978 (48 conterminous states except Minnesota).

HISTORICAL STATUS: The gray wolf had the greatest distribution of any mammal other than man and was historically found throughout North America with the exception of parts of the southwest and southeast United States. In the southeast U.S. the gray wolf was replaced by the smaller red wolf. The gray wolf was present throughout Montana.

PRESENT STATUS: The gray wolf is extirpated from the lower 48 states with the exception of Minnesota and small populations in Montana, Wisconsin, Michigan, Idaho, and Washington. Montana wolf populations are found in the Glacier National Park—Bob Marshall Wilderness complex and in the extreme southwestern part of the state. Wolf populations have recovered in Minnesota and are recovering in other areas of the lower 48 states.

HABITAT: Historically, the gray wolf occupied almost all habitats in North America including the Great Plains.

LIFE HISTORY: Gray wolves breed in late winter usually when they are 3 years of age. After a gestation period of 63 days an average litter of 6 pups is born in a den in the ground, rock pile, hollow log, or other shelter. When the pups reach 8 weeks of age, the adults may move them to another den. By October the pups will weigh about 60 pounds and travel with the adults. Young gray wolves usually stay with the adults for 2 years, forming a pack. At 2 years of age, they may disperse hundreds of miles from their original home. Gray wolves usually hunt large animals such as moose and deer although beaver and other smaller animals supplement their diet. Gray wolves are often more successful taking old, weak, or injured prey. Gray wolves are territorial and will keep other gray wolves

and coyotes out of their 50-100 square mile home range. Howling is a way for pack members to communicate.

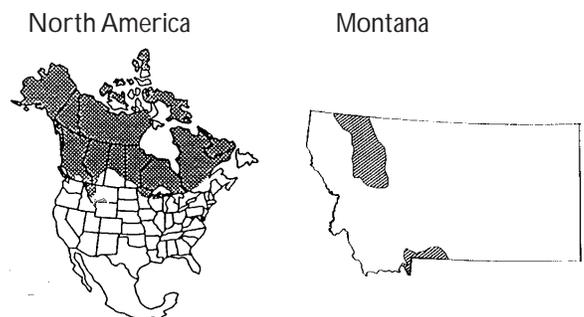
AID TO IDENTIFICATION: Gray wolves can range in color from white to black although gray is the predominant color. Mature gray wolves generally weigh from 70-115 pounds and stand about 30 inches high at the shoulder. Coyotes are considerably smaller than gray wolves, usually weighing less than 35 pounds. A good field guide is that gray wolves will be larger than a typical German shepherd while coyotes will be smaller. The track of a gray wolf will be about 5 inches long compared to 3 inches for a coyote track. Some dogs such as Great Danes can have tracks as large as a gray wolf.

REASONS FOR DECLINE: Gray wolves have been exterminated by shooting, trapping, and poisoning throughout most of the lower 48 states.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Reports or sign of gray wolves should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

COMMENTS: There are no known gray wolf attacks on humans in modern times in North America. Gray wolves do take livestock although the occurrences are rare. For individual producers, however, losses can be significant. Some states have programs that reimburse livestock owners for wolf damage.

REFERENCES: *Wolf, A Modern Look* by Wolves in American Culture Committee, 1986.



Present Distribution of the Gray Wolf