

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
July 14, 2017

Written Testimony of
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S. 1514 Hunting Heritage and Environmental Legacy Preservation for Wildlife Act” or the “HELP for Wildlife Act” (S.1514)

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and Committee Members, on behalf of the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts, thank you for advancing legislation that includes provisions to congressionally confirm the delisting of the Gray Wolf in Wyoming and prevent further litigation.

As you are aware the U.S. Fish & Wildlife’s decision to delist was upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (No. 14-5300) and the rule to delist was republished on May 1, 2017 (82 Fed. Reg. 20284) to reinstate the removal of Federal protections for the Gray Wolf in Wyoming under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The Association supports the provisions specifically preventing this decision from further judicial review.

The local Districts are charged statutorily with natural resource conservation, including water, soil, and range and wildlife habitat. Further, the districts have statutory responsibility to work with the private land owners to conserve their natural resources and provide for economic stability and sustainability. 11-16-101 *et. seq.*,

The Association has been a member of the Wyoming Wolf Coalition in supporting and defending the delisting of the Wolf and transfer of management to the state. As recently stated by the US Fish & Wildlife Service:

“Meanwhile, the state’s annual wolf numbers reveal an enduring healthy population, with approximately 377 wolves in 52 packs with 25 breeding pairs. The Northern Rocky Mountain population as a whole continues to be self-sustaining, with numbers well above federal management objectives.”¹

The state is capable of managing the Wolf pursuant to Wyoming’s Wolf Management Plan. Spending significant resources to defend against repeated legal challenges detracts from other high priority wildlife habitat enhancement and conservation projects. Further, it serves to jeopardize other natural resource and wildlife resources important to our communities and the private land owners.

As articulated by the Wolf Coalition in its defense and support of the State of Wyoming:

“Wyoming must balance its mandate to protect and preserve a recovered wolf population, with its duty to protect and preserve the prey upon which the wolves feed. Wyoming must consider the impact that wolves have on private property, particularly livestock. Wyoming must consider the impact that wolves have on other wildlife, particularly elk and moose populations. Wyoming must consider the economic well-being of all industry groups and local governments. After balancing

¹ <https://www.fws.gov/home/wolfrecovery/>

these various interests, Wyoming developed and adopted a Management Plan that was properly tailored and based on sound science. The USFWS recognizes the soundness of that Plan.²

Given the WACD's responsibility to provide for a balanced approach to both conservation objectives as well as stability in the industry, we believe it is imperative that the management of Wolves remain in the state's jurisdiction.

The private landowners in Wyoming provide significant habitat for wildlife resources. For example, the statewide distribution of habitat is 55%, 40%, and 58% of pronghorn, elk, and mule deer winter range, respectively, is in private ownership. The statewide distribution of privately-owned Greater Sage-grouse core habitat is approximately 35%. This habitat is provided by predominately working ranches. These same private landowners are experiencing significant losses from wolves, hence continuing to put pressure on their ability to maintain economically viable operations.

The Association is deeply concerned that without a balanced approach to species conservation and protection, which recognizes and includes a recognition of the contribution private working ranching landscapes provide for multiple species and ecosystem services, the resulting consequence will ultimately be a loss of habitat as these ranges are sold and subdivided.

We appreciate the recognition provided in S.1514 that the Wolf has been recovered and that adequate protections are in place to ensure future viability, and that litigation on this matter is frivolous, unnecessary and waste taxpayer's dollars at the federal, state and local levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the record.

² Wyoming Wolf Coalition – 2013 Amicus Curiae Brief in Support of Appellant State of Wyoming; No.14-5300