

# Wolf advocates to rally on National Mall

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Published: Wednesday, August 7, 2013

Nearly a dozen wildlife advocacy groups are organizing a rally on the National Mall next month to oppose the Interior Department's proposal to remove Endangered Species Act protections for wolves across most of the continental United States.

The National Rally to Protect America's Wolves will begin at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 7, at the Washington Monument and will include speeches and a march, pending National Park Service approval.

The rally follows the Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal in June to turn management of the iconic predators over to the states everywhere but parts of Arizona and New Mexico. The decision was hailed by Western states, livestock groups and hunters who agreed with the agency that wolves are no longer in danger of extinction after being nearly eradicated from the lower 48 states.

More than 6,000 wolves roam the western Great Lakes states and Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, up from virtually zero when they were listed in the 1970s. But some environmental groups argued that wolves have yet to return to most of their historical range and that protections should remain so the animals can recolonize suitable habitat in the southern Rockies, the Pacific Northwest and the Northeast.

The groups organizing next month's rally are WildEarth Guardians, Protect America's Wolves, Project Wolf, Predator Defense, the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center, Friends of Animals, Project Coyote, Howling for Wolves, Good Wolf, the Northern Idaho Wolf Alliance and Howling for Justice. "Stand up to this administration's decision to delist the gray wolf despite the science as well as the will of most Americans," WildEarth said in an email yesterday to followers. "Without Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections, wolves will be at the mercy of hunters' guns and state wildlife agencies that profit from issuing wolf hunting permits -- the very threats that drove wolves to the edge of extinction."

It is unclear how many are expected to attend the rally. The event's Facebook page currently has about 500 followers. National groups including Defenders of Wildlife, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club are not involved with the event, though they have also vigorously opposed the delisting plan. Few endangered species have stirred as much emotion and controversy as the wolf, a distant cousin of dogs that is often blamed for preying on livestock and big-game animals but has also been found to provide ecological value for Western landscapes.

While some environmental groups support wolf hunting where the animal is already delisted in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, the groups organizing next month's rally called those hunts "unethical, cruel and unjust persecution." "Wolves have been persecuted and massacred for centuries, due to human ignorance, intolerance and cruelty," rally organizers wrote on their website. "It is the very opposite of the respect, admiration and protection they deserve."

Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe in June noted that states have been "professional" and "transparent" in their wolf management and that wolves in the northern Rockies and Great Lakes are strengthened by much larger populations to the north in Canada. Northern Rockies states are required to maintain sufficient breeding pairs or else the Fish and Wildlife Service can consider relisting them.