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For Immediate Release

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Northeast Wolf Coalition Calls on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Withdraw Gray Wolf Proposals

South Salem, New York - The Northeast Wolf Coalition, a group of national, regional and local conservation organizations, submitted a statement today to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in opposition to its 2013 proposal to remove Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for the gray wolf (Canis lupus) in the contiguous United States. The Coalition took action in response to FWS' reopening of the comment period as a result of a peer review report by an independent panel of scientists produced by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) at UC Santa Barbara. According to the report, FWS' move to strip federal protection from nearly all gray wolves in the lower 48 states is based on insufficient science.

The peer review committee was particularly critical of the Service's determination that the gray wolf never occurred in 29 eastern states. Based in part on preliminary conclusions from a single 2012 paper written by biologists employed by FWS, the Service contended that the eastern half of the U.S. was occupied by Canis lycaon or the "eastern wolf," a distinct species of wolf and not belonging to the gray wolf species, Canis lupus.

Under the ESA, FWS is obligated to recover endangered species across a “significant portion” of its historic range. If the eastern half of the U.S. was never a part of the gray wolf’s historic range, FWS contends that Canis lupus (a.k.a. gray wolves) now occupy enough of its historic range to be considered recovered. Thus, FWS made its determination that gray wolves no longer warrant ESA protection.

But, on February 7, 2014, the peer review panel reported that "there is not currently sufficient scientific support for the recognition of C. lycaon [eastern wolf] as a separate species... thus
"there was unanimity among the panel that the [delisting] rule does not currently represent the 'best available science.'"

"Best science regarding wolf taxonomy and trophic cascades furnishes powerful evidence of our need to conserve wolves in the northeastern US via ESA protection and other available policy and management tools," stated Cristina Eisenberg. As Aldo Leopold, Adolph Murie, and others argued so eloquently decades ago, apex predators, especially wolves, are essential in order to have resilient, healthy ecosystems. This is especially true today, given climate change and habitat fragmentation."

The value and importance of conserving endangered species and ensuring biodiversity is an accepted axiom of the 21st century. The importance of a keystone predator such as the gray wolf to a more functional ecosystem is undeniable. That our policies would and should be motivated by the best available scientific principles is critical. As a result, the Northeast Wolf Coalition, with the guidance of scientific mentors and advisers, urged FWS to withdraw its proposal with a statement submitted during the Service's public comment period.

"We have unique opportunities and challenges here in the Northeast," said Maggie Howell, Wolf Conservation Center. "The Northeast Wolf Coalition is working together using the most current peer reviewed science to raise awareness and increase public understanding about wolves. A broad base of public support is necessary for wolves to recover and we remain committed to ensuring that stakeholders become active stewards in that regard. There are biological, economic and ethical reasons to facilitate wolf recovery and the Coalition is eager to work with area residents, organizations, and state and federal agencies to promote the wolf's natural return to our region."

"Our Northeast boreal and mixed-hardwood ecosystems in the Adirondacks need top predators like the wolf to fully function. As wolves disperse from Canada into our region from the North and the West - and we already have seen significant evidence that this can and has happened - we simply must preserve and protect wolves and all top canids. Thus we believe the FWS' proposal to delist wolves has no merit." stated Dan Plumley, Partner with Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve.

"The FWS - and Northeastern state wildlife agencies - need to recognize that wolf recovery dovetails with the recovery of collapsing ecosystems in the Northeast." Chris Spatz, Cougar Rewilding Foundation.

“The gray wolf should not be removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species,” said William C. Janeway, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council in New York. “Clearly, the population of the gray wolf has not been restored. There is no wolf population in the Northeast. The proposed delisting would virtually prevent gray wolves from naturally finding their way back to the Adirondack Park, a place they once roamed.”

"When confronted about FWS' plan to delist gray wolves, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell asserted that she has no choice in the matter, 'it's about science and you do what the science
says. Now that the peer review confirms our beliefs, the Northeast Wolf Coalition wants to hold Jewell to her word," said Tara Thornton, Endangered Species Coalition.

The public comment period remains open until March 27, 2014. To learn more about the Northeast Wolf Coalition and FWS' delisting proposal, visit northeastwolf.org.

The Northeast Wolf Coalition includes the following member organizations and supporters:
Adirondack Council - Adirondack Wild - American Ecological Research Institute - Center For Biological Diversity-Cougar Rewilding Foundation - Endangered Species Coalition - Maine Wolf Coalition - Protect the Adirondacks - Red Wolf Coalition - Wildlands Network - Wolf Conservation Center

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