



NEWS RELEASE

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

July 15, 1996

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**WOLF REINTRODUCTION UNDER BUDGET AND AHEAD OF SCHEDULE;
NO FURTHER RELEASES FOR IDAHO OR YELLOWSTONE IN 1997**

Reintroduction of the gray wolf in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming and in central Idaho has been so successful that no new releases will be made in either area in 1997, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced today.

"The wolves already released have reproduced well and suffered few losses and the program so far is not only under budget but ahead of schedule," Babbitt said. "I have concurred with a recommendation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that we forgo any further reintroductions in the immediate future."

Ralph Morgenweck, the Service's regional director in Denver, Colorado, said, "If the wolf population in one recovery area does appear to lag, we have the option of moving animals from one area to another." Morgenweck said that type of relocation work is routine and also substantially reduces costs and planning.

"Forgoing releases in 1997 will also help reduce potential wolf pack conflicts," said Ed Bangs, the wolf reintroduction program coordinator. Seven wolves have been lost in Yellowstone in 1996--two adults and one pup were believed killed by other wolves, two were illegally killed, one was hit by a car, and one died after falling into a hot spring.

Seven litters of wolves were believed born this spring to reintroduced parents in in central Idaho. Four of the reintroduced Idaho wolves died in Idaho in 1996 according to the Nez Perce Tribe, which monitors wolf activity in Idaho. One was shot, one was killed by a mountain lion, one drowned, and one death was from undetermined causes.

Fifteen wolves were reintroduced into central Idaho and 14 in Yellowstone National Park in 1995. Twenty wolves were reintroduced in central Idaho and 17 in Yellowstone National Park in 1996.

Bangs said while wolf mortality in Yellowstone was slightly higher than in Idaho, the rate remains below predictions. "With the two litters born last year to the Yellowstone wolves, we started off much better than expected and that momentum has continued throughout this year." Bangs said any reintroduction proposals beyond 1997 will be evaluated on a yearly basis.

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Prior to the reintroduction of the gray wolf, the animals had been absent from Yellowstone and central Idaho since the late 1920s. The reintroduction goal calls for establishment of 10 breeding pairs in each of three recovery areas for three successive years, which would result in a recovered wolf population and removal of wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains from the endangered species list by 2002. Central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park are two of the recovery areas; northwest Montana is the third, although it is not a reintroduction zone.