

Written Testimony

of

Maureen Hackett, MD  
President and Founder  
Howling For Wolves

To

House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

May 18, 2018

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of Howling For Wolves for the FY 2019 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies' Appropriations Bill. Howling For Wolves is a nonprofit wolf-advocacy organization based in Minnesota that was formed in 2012 to educate the public and government officials about the gray wolf and to foster tolerance and understanding to ensure the wolf's long-term survival. The gray wolf is as much a part of the American spirit as the bald eagle, another critically endangered species saved by the Endangered Species Act. Even following the eagle's removal from the endangered species list, another federal law was needed to prevent hunting the eagle after delisting. Fortunately for the eagle, the public's attitude toward hunting them has shifted, but that additional protection is still needed to keep the eagle a recovered species. Today, the wolf faces a very hostile environment, even while under federal protection. I am writing to advocate to keep the wolf protected by the Endangered Species Act until a paradigm shift can occur and a more tolerant attitude can be fostered for the wolf.

As a U.S. Air Force veteran, practicing physician, and professor who specializes in forensic psychiatry, I believed it is important to the State of Minnesota, and our country to do everything I can to protect one of our national symbols; the gray wolf. This led to the founding of Howling For Wolves. The wolf of the Great Lakes region is a pure gray wolf as distinct from wolf-coyote hybrids and originated here after crossing from the old world during the ice age. The Minnesota gray wolf is the only wolf population in the contiguous United States that has never gone extinct. Gray wolves once roamed nearly the entire lower 48 states until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when they were nearly eradicated through government sponsored bounties and hunting.

In 1974, the gray wolf was the first mammal listed according to the Endangered Species Act as endangered and then as threatened in 1978. Minnesota's wolves are credited with bringing back wolves to Michigan and Wisconsin.

The wolf keeps wilderness habitat healthy and as such is the keystone species for the forest and grassland ecosystems. The wolf is like the blood coursing through the lands sustaining habitat. The wolf keeps other species on the move and culls the sick and less productive prey and actually improves the health and even size of elk and deer. The wolf sustains forest and grasslands by allowing plants and trees to grow. Thus, the wolf provides food and habitat even for insects, fish and birds, along with the large prey including elk and deer. Studies in Wisconsin have demonstrated that where wolves have returned, the forest plants are more abundant in types and numbers. And in Yellowstone, the river and streams are healthier because the deer and elk do not graze along the river's edge for very long due to the presence of wolves. This has been termed the "ecology of fear" and has been demonstrated since the re-introduction of wolves in 1995 to Yellowstone National Park after wolves were absent since 1927 when the last wolf was killed. The riverbanks now have more plants, less erosion and support more wildlife. More vegetation supports more

beaver that have now dammed up more streams. This makes cooler river temperatures and healthier fish. The increased vegetation also provides for a healthier bird and small animal habitat. The wolf is also an ally in combating contagious diseases in deer like chronic wasting disease, a true threat. The wolf can provide around the clock vigilance for sick animals and take them out before they spread their disease to healthy deer. The wolf is truly an ally for our natural environment.

Gray wolves are pack animals that live in small groupings of mostly family members. The alpha male and female are usually the only pack members to have pups, which are raised by the entire pack. If a litter of pups is orphaned by its pack due to their death, another pack will raise them. Wolves do not kill wolf pups; they adopt them. This illustrates how wolves are social animals and their reproduction is socially controlled too. Yet throughout history wolves have been feared and misunderstood. The myth that wolves are dangerous to people has been promulgated since the dawn of agriculture. To see this, one need only read fairy tales or see the latest Disney movie. The wolf as a menace to livestock is hyped in news stories citing wolf conflicts with livestock despite these being rare occurrences. The wolf has become a wedge issue, used by elected officials to promote their policies. Many leaders demonize and propose to delist and hunt gray wolves to score political points with agricultural and trophy hunting groups. From the beginning of our country, killing predators was considered a patriotic act.

Yet wolves do not make it a practice to predate on livestock including cattle. For example, in Northern Minnesota where there are 165,000 cattle, there were 91 confirmed wolf predations verified in 2011 when wolf numbers were likely the highest and the wolf was still under federal protections. This 0.06% of verified wolf kills on cattle in Northern Minnesota is in line with numbers of verified wolf- livestock predations in other parts of the US. Yet, massive wolf hunts are set to go into effect as soon as the states have authority over the wolf. Howling For Wolves does not challenge the rights of farmers to protect their livestock from predators. However, we now know that killing wolves generally creates more problems than it solves. Avoiding conflicts with wolves by establishing a territory boundary using nonlethal prevention methods is more effective and over time can stabilize wolf packs. Not killing wolves and first using nonlethal methods allows them to live long enough to learn boundaries and to pass this knowledge onto their pack mates. Prevention methods exist that do this such as fladery (flagging), guard dogs, and audible alarms to name a few. While we understand that these are not always successful, they can reduce wolf livestock conflicts and stabilize packs, so that farmers do not have to re-establish their boundaries with new wolves. Killing wolves creates unstable packs that no longer have the social structure to control their reproduction. When wolves are killed, smaller and younger wolf packs are tasked with raising pups and they cannot effectively hunt wild prey. A twenty-five year study of western ranches by Washington State University demonstrated that killing one wolf in response to a cattle loss created a 3% increase in predation the following year.

Howling For Wolves has supported and lobbied to pass a law in Minnesota to reimburse farmers for nonlethal prevention methods. Wolves in Minnesota are already killed by USDA Wildlife Services (WS) in response to livestock predation, and the farmers are reimbursed for their losses. Preventing the loss is preferred by nearly everyone. But what is not understood (especially by the USDA-WS) is that killing wolves actually makes nonlethal methods less effective because the farmer is then having to deal with re-establishing boundaries with new wolves. Basically, dead wolves do not teach other wolves to avoid an area and dead wolves do not pass on wild animal hunting knowledge to their packs. Our goal is to change the paradigm of wolf management so that when the wolf is removed from the endangered species list, an immediate public hunt is not started. A public hunt is wolf killing on steroids and creates havoc for farmers and even for the public. We witnessed this in Minnesota with an increase in complaints of livestock conflicts and pet conflicts following three consecutive wolf trapping and killing seasons. We are working to implement nonlethal first responses, so that packs can remain stable and human wolf killing is reserved for when conflicts occur despite prevention efforts. Wolves are territorial and will limit their own numbers naturally. They do this in territorial disputes and their reproduction is reduced when they are stressed socially or by less prey.

Unfortunately, anti-wolf legislators are misguidedly pushing to delist this majestic animal through policy riders on Appropriations Bills, the Farm Bill and omnibus spending bills. We do not believe Congress should make decisions about which species need protection under the Endangered Species Act. The ESA is a law of last resort; species are listed after state management has proven insufficient to protect habitat and prevent extinction. The Courts have ruled again and again that the gray wolf is not sufficiently recovered to warrant delisting and once they are delisted we know they face public hunts which is the stated motivation to delist wolves in Minnesota since farmers can already have them killed by government agents and they are reimbursed for losses. Turning management responsibilities to the states is tantamount to driving the gray wolf into extinction. Wolves face many threats and state agencies are not able to protect them. In Minnesota, we have many cases of illegal wolf killing despite federal protections and our state agency has promised to “pick up where we left off” and implement wolf trapping seasons as soon as they are no longer protected federally. In fact, our state removed the wolf from the state’s list of species of special concern before the first wolf hunt which occurred immediately and without even a baseline population estimate following delisting in 2012.

Congress has pushed repeatedly to delist the gray wolf. The most recent effort to insert a policy rider on the FY 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Bill contained a provision preventing courts from reviewing this action. This raises serious constitutional questions and is a dangerous precedent to allow Congress to prevent the judiciary from reviewing laws. This could be used destructively toward our republic.

For now, the war on wolves is real, even though the wolf is federally protected. We know in

Minnesota that wolves are illegally killed and their recovery is still threatened. Attempts by Congress to delist the gray wolf, confuses the public's understanding that wolves still need to be recovered. Congressionally removing federal protection for the wolf removes science and the public from this decision and gives it to partisan Members of Congress. This action will disregard substantial evidence that wolves need protections. And these riders do nothing to reduce wolf-livestock conflicts.

The overwhelming public sentiment supports keeping the wolf protected. Please do not ignore millions of American voices, including the majority of scientists in this area, who support keeping the gray wolf federally protected and to not allow states to allow a hunting season on them. We ask for more time while we work to change attitudes and protect the gray wolf for future generations.