

**INTERNATIONAL WOLF CENTER
PRESS CONFERENCE – DISCUSSION PANEL**

**Moderator: Nancy Gibson
December 22, 2014
2:00 p.m. CT**

Rob Schultz: While we're waiting for everyone to get online here. I'll go ahead and introduce myself. My name is Rob Schultz. I'm the executive director of the International Wolf Center.

And we're very excited to be able to present a panel of experts today. We've asked Nancy Gibson who is a co-founder of the International Wolf Center and also a prominent naturalist into our discussion today as a moderator. Nancy, I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to you and welcome.

Nancy Gibson: Thank you everyone and I appreciate everybody coming from around the nation as reporters and as experts to help us try to sort out some of the deep legislative issues. So what we're going to do is I have four questions to start with and then we'll follow it up with a question and answer period.

So I want to introduce our panel members, we have Dr. Dave Mech, he is the senior biologist with the U.S. geological surveys and has studied ((inaudible)). Also we have Mike Phillips, he is currently with the Turner Endangered Species Fund and was the lead person for the reintroduction of the wolves into Yellowstone National Park.

Along with him, we have Dick Thiel who is the former Department of Natural Resources wolf biologist for Wisconsin and then we also have Rick Duncan who is a lawyer of Faegre and Benson and he has worked on wolf issues for many, many years.

I want to remind the participants that these are the opinions of our panel of experts. It does in fact represent the position of the International Wolf Center. Our mission is to teach the world about wolves and one of our missions is to provide a forum with this. We're going to leave it to our supporters and the public to form their own opinions. So with that I'm going to start in with the experts here. I'm hoping that each of them will answer my question and answer it briefly so that we have time for the reporters to also ask questions. So I'm going to start off with Dick Thiel. I'm going to ask you are biologically, are wolves endangered in Wisconsin?

Dick Thiel: In my opinion, they are not.

Nancy Gibson: Because?

Dick Thiel: We have a large enough population as part of a regional population. We've been doing studies and monitoring wolves for the last 35 or 40 years as they started colonization of this state and the size of the population and its performance in terms of reproduction and sustained ((inaudible)) suggest to me that they are doing just fine, at the present time.

Nancy Gibson: All right, Dr. Mech, could you comment on Minnesota. Are wolves endangered in Minnesota.

David Mech: You wanted to us to be synch so I'll just say no.

Nancy Gibson: So could you tell us a little more?

David Mech: OK, as you know there is somewhere around 2500 wolves or so in Minnesota and there has been as many as 1250 starting in 1978 and they have just continued to increase since then. There's no sign that they're showing any sign of endangerment.

Nancy Gibson: OK, and Mike Phillips would be comfortable commenting on Michigan.

Mike Phillips: Sure, I can talk about the whole Great Lake States if you'd like but the fact of the matter is biologically, no they're not endangered. They're not threatened. They're quite secure. Dave did mention the Minnesota bunch for example is also connected genetically and physically to thousands of animals in Canada but are they endangered per the law, yes they are.

Are they endangered biologically, no they're not and I'm glad we've got an attorney on the phone because, the endangered species act speaks to not only biology but rules and policies and laws and so biologically secure, legally endangered.

Nancy Gibson: And who would like to speak about Michigan?

Dick Thiel: This is Dick Thiel, I can speak for Michigan, their status is very similar to Wisconsin. The population are physically one. They exist throughout the upper peninsula with some rare exceptions. They're doing very well.

Wisconsin has about, they have about 650 wolves and I believe Michigan has about slightly less and in terms of densities and the landscape that is available to ((inaudible)) the extent of the colonizing stature available to them in both the upper peninsula Michigan and in the northern reach of Wisconsin and the parts of central Wisconsin so in those few states, and specifically in Michigan they are not biologically endangered.

Mike Phillips: Nancy, can I ask who or how far a field do the journalist represent? Are they just all reporting for Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan or you said there are a bunch on the phone, how far across the country do we have people sitting and listening.

Nancy Gibson: Right, now it's just those three states unless somebody else can identify themselves, probably also have Associated Press.

Mike Phillips: But everybody recognizes that the judge is ruling touched on an issue much bigger than the Great Lake States and hopefully, Nancy our questions will get us there.

Nancy Gibson: And we will talk about it. All right, so I want to ask all of you would state management endanger the wolves, why would it or why not and Dick, we'll start with you again for Wisconsin.

Dick Thiel: Once the wolf was listed in 2012, the state of Wisconsin legislatively through the political process passed a law initiating almost essentially immediately a harvest or hunt on wolves. It's a particular season had been very contentious.

The gist of it is that they want us to drive the population at that point in time was 850 animal cells to 350 wolves ((inaudible)) Wisconsin be in our management plan in 1999 suggest that it might be a population that could be reached and keep in mind in 1999 there were less than 250 wolves in the state of Wisconsin and so there is some suggestion that state management definitely in this case is driving this downward but the suggestion is that because the state's political processes really did not follow administrative challenges and management suggestions, I think the answer really is the jury is out on whether state management in Wisconsin is going to endanger them biologically. Essentially we have to see what they would do and of course ((inaudible)) put a halt on that at least temporarily.

Nancy Gibson: What about you Dr. Mech, do you think the state management will endanger wolves, why or why not?

David Mech: Well, legally it can't because there's – there are provisions in place. There's a post D listing monitoring plan that ((inaudible)) service has that watches the status of wolves in each of the

states after they D listed for five years after they're delisted and should any of the triggers for relisting be met, the federal government would immediately relist the wolves.

And the states know this, the states have all agreed to these D-listing or sorry this post D-listing monitoring and the post D-listing plan and they know that they cannot provide for regulations that will reduce the wolf population so much that it's endangered and furthermore, they've not been doing that.

All of the regulations in the three states, the hunting or taking regulations in the three states are conservative enough so that there is no way they're going to endanger the populations.

Nancy Gibson: And Dave, do you feel that's the same way in Michigan?

David Mech: Sorry?

Nancy Gibson: Do you feel that is the same case in Michigan?

David Mech: Yes, in Michigan as well. Yes, in fact in Michigan you know they did not even have a hunting season this year, they wanted to but the public prevented that but even like last year, they did have a season, they took so few wolves. It hardly touched the population.

Nancy Gibson: So could you speak about the biological effect of relisting the wolf back to the endangered and threatened species list, I'll start with you Dick.

Dick Thiel: Well, I'm not sure if – I'll let Dave talk about Minnesota. I'm not sure if it's going back to threatened there but Michigan and Wisconsin is going back to endangered and the biological aspect to that will be I believe that the population will need to be saved will probably rise again.

Michigan possibly less so because there's less need for them to expand into but in Wisconsin there's certainly room to improve. The problem with that is that the areas of their state can expand ((inaudible)) and have done in the past with ((inaudible)). So I think the biological factors ((inaudible)) will be a shift upwards in the number of ((inaudible)).

Nancy Gibson: As well in Minnesota, Dave?

David Mech: Not necessarily in Minnesota. The annual harvest has been so light relative to the total population that whether they're taken or they're not taken probably won't have much of an effect. It would be depend a lot on what the state would plan for future harvest, you know each year their quotas have been different and it is conceivable that as they see that they can take more and more wolves without really hurting the basic population, conceivably they would have increased the quota.

And at some point, it could you know higher quota at some point could retard the increase in those wolf population but so far it hasn't and so I think protecting the wolves – protections now would really not do much – that much good because there's not many taken percentage wise anyway.

Nancy Gibson: OK, and Mike do you have any – Mike Phillips do you have any comment about this state management, endangering wolves?

Mike Phillips: Yes, I have great faith the states would do fine. They would not manage grey wolves in a manner that would lead to their biological endangerment for all the reasons that have been stated.

I think probably there'll be some increase in the Great Lake states. Dave makes a great point, maybe there won't be much of ((inaudible)) in Minnesota. There is the potential for this to slow

them at range wide recovery efforts that would not take place otherwise and so Nancy, the question so far have had a Great Lakes States focus and that's understandable but if it really is a range wide ruling and it touches on the fate of grey wolves elsewhere and I think that this ruling has potential to increase the prospects for gray wolves occupying currently unoccupied states such like Western Colorado.

David Mech: Yes, and I agree with that Nancy and conceivably even some of the Minnesota wolves if they are, if they were to be continually protected, the chances of them dispersing into say North and South Dakota would be greater with the total protection than it would be with the state taking a few hundred a year.

I mean with that few hundred as I said you know doesn't do that much – have that much effect on the total population but it could have some effect on the number of dispersals that leave the state and I don't for a minute think that wolves are going to repopulate Iowa or Indiana or Illinois because people just won't let them.

But it's conceivable that in some years, they could repopulate parts of South and North Dakota where they have dispersed to in the past and the humans have killed them there as well but if enough of them got into South and North Dakota, there's some places there I think where maybe they could take hold.

Female: Excuse, who is speaking just now?

Nancy Gibson: That's Dr. Dave Mech.

Female: OK.

David Mech: So, Nancy a challenge to the journalist is to recognize that while this is a story of great local importance, it has – it is equally important on a national level and that's not an easy new onset for readers this ruling is long, it's detailed. The judge certainly did her homework and it's a story of national importance.

Nancy Gibson: OK, Mike, I'm going to ask you this question. Can you give us a history of wolves and politics and how it might, this might affect them in the future.

Mike Phillips: Well, I think it's clear that without the endangered species act, you'd have a handful of wolves sticking around Northern Minnesota and on IOL and that would be about it.

Individuals would persistently try to occupy states like Montana, and they might punch down through North Dakota but they would mostly get picked off and I doubt there'd be much going on. Northwestern Montana might support a handful. Minnesota certainly would but the endangered species act is I think singularly responsible for the distribution of grey wolves in the country today because it afforded important protection.

And it gave the United States Fish and Wildlife Service sufficient rationale to move forward with determined recovery programs that resulted in great successes in large part because we're dealing with a great ecological ((inaudible)). If you give a grey wolf even a halfway decent respiration plan, it will take care of the rest.

And so the laws have allowed for the wolf to become more numerous than it ever was in the recent past but ((inaudible)) that's it. It still only occupies about 50% historical range. There are still great big chunks of this country, the continental U.S. that support extensive tracks of suitable habitat that remain wolf less and some would say that the law requires the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to look at those places too.

And ((inaudible)) they have avoided that kind of systematic nationwide approach in favor of a piecemeal approach that's worked very well, piecemeal being the Great Lake States, the Northern Rocky Mountains in the southwest and some considerations of the extreme northeast but really this is a national story, they have significance because the law has impact from coast to coast. The law being the endangered species act.

Nancy Gibson: Can you brief us a little bit on this history of wolves and politics, Mike?

Mike Phillips: Well, it's been controversial. It's been divisive, a grey wolves generate a lot of emotion on both sides of the spectrum. It's hard to find people that reside comfortably in the middle. I would believe that myself, Dave and Dick all reside comfortably in the middle.

We differ somewhat on our interpretation of what the law required but as everybody I think on the phone knows, grey wolves are quite a flashpoint of controversy and it's not – to some extent, it's a result of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service keeps proposing things that keep getting set aside and it's interesting to me that other D-listing actions that the federal agency has advanced and there haven't been many but there's been a few about 20, it's only the grey wolf that seems to get this kind of concern and controversy, grizzly bears notwithstanding.

And I think it's a result of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service adopting a relatively modest threshold for recovery for the grey wolf that has not been the threshold for other species. Quite simply other species are really relatively common at the time of D-listing and that's not been the case for the grey wolf.

Moreover, I would remind the journalist that while there's clearly a viability component to recovery as defined by the endangered species act, a species has to be demographically secure for example, there's also clear reference in the history of the law and the law itself that there is a geographic component specifically the phrase significant portion of range means a lot. And so

because the law is a bit ambiguous Nancy and because Ray will also just very romanticize species, the whole thing is causing a great deal of controversies and divisiveness that manifest itself in all of these political theaters around the country.

(Crosstalk)

Nancy Gibson: (Either)...

Male: Well done, (Senator).

Nancy Gibson: Dave or Dick, do you want to respond?

Dave Mech: Well, yes. I think Mike is pretty much right in all that, however, being twice as old as he is I have some more history and I was actually around when the Endangered Species Act was passed and when the first – actually I wrote the first recovery plan which is for the red wolf at that time in the early '70s.

And I know the service is thinking on all this and that was that because of just exactly what Mike has mentioned, the controversial nature of the wolf and the kind of problems that can bring to the general public, the service from the beginning has been fairly conservative in the way they have tried to promote recovery of the wolf knowing (full well) that if there were many wolves in too many areas it could be – it could actually endanger the Endangered Species Act itself,.

And in fact, I think we've seen a bit of that started a half in now in Montana and Idaho after several court decisions that went against the delisting. What happened? Congress took it upon themselves to delist the wolves in Montana and Idaho and that was a real slam against the Endangered Species Act, you know, very dangerous precedent in my book and I'm afraid we might see the same thing as a result of this recent decision.

I could just see Congress deciding to just legislatively delist the wolves in the Upper Midwest just like they did in Montana and Idaho or given the current or the future make-up or the make-up of the future Congress, we know that generally the Republicans have not been very sympathetic to the Endangered Species Act and I could see them (gutting) the act and I think that's in the beginning the Fish and Wildlife Service recognized all this and decided that with the wolf much more controversial than just about many other of the endangered species including the alligator and even the (grizzly bear) much more controversial as the wolf and therefore they decided to be more conservative, and they think for the reasons I've stated.

Mike Phillips: And wait – can I – I got – Dave made a great point. I was at the general...

(Crosstalk)

Nancy Gibson: I think open it up here joint – because the reporters...

Female: OK. And this is – Mike are talking – is that Mike talking?

Mike Phillips: Yes.

Nancy Gibson: Yes and would you like...

Female: OK.

Nancy Gibson: ... ask the question? All right. Who wants to go first?

Female: Hello. I'd like ((inaudible)) Mike can go first.

Josephine Marcotty: This is Josephine from the Star Tribune. I'll jump in if that's OK, Nancy? I know Mike, you made mentioned of the fact that this is an – this is a decision that has national implication. There's a lot but has to do – I mean, when I read this decision it seems this is the judge has sort of eviscerated the entire strategy of the Fish and Wildlife Service has adopted in terms of trying to – as you said delist this animal piecemeal.

Both the – in terms of the species, subspecies strategy that they adopted plus this whole – their interpretation of the historic range question of werewolf should and shouldn't be. That seems to have been their entire strategy of doing this is, you know, using those – using those two pieces but that's exactly what she said isn't correct. So, is that what you mean – I mean, this is just sort of – this sort of take a part, you know, not just delisting the species but the wolf in other parts of the country and other species?

Mike Phillips: Josephine, I interpreted exactly the way you do and I think it's fair to recognize that judge concluded, you can't create a (DTS) just for the (so called) of delisting the (DTS). It was never the original listed entity. This has a great deal to do of how the law is interpreted both by the implementers and by the judiciary and a lot less to do with the biology of the gray wolf in Minnesota and Wisconsin initially.

And Dave is right, it could be for our (form) – consequences but that's up to Congress to wrestle with and it's up to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to respond to have Congress chooses to wrestle with the (act), but I would have the ability that when the Congress had stepped in and micro manage the act, as Dave referenced in the Northern Rocky Mountains to delist (them here).

Those are great deal to do with electoral politics at the moment and it had to do with the very difficult reelection did by Democratic senator – the Democrats had control in the Senate. They did not want to lose another seat and so they were almost certainly able to convince the very

progressive U.S. Senators to not (fill or bust) on the idea. It's relatively easy as you guys know if anyone senator to stop any kind of legislation (did in these tracks) given the (fill or bust) the rules in United States Senate whether those rules are good or bad except the rules that's (used in the West), but Josephine I agree with your interpretation correctly.

The service adopted a (range-wide) delisting that they tried to effect to regional recovery programs in this piecemeal approach and the two just don't fit. Maybe they should, maybe the service has functionally developed the very best way to implement the act but as the judges have consistently ruled unfortunately is not legal.

Nancy Gibson: OK. All right. Got another question?

Steve Karnowski: This is Steve Karnowski from the AP. Part of the judge's decision, the correct way was (appealing) with the (judges) in the Upper Midwest, we still need to do a – repopulate the rest of the country. There's kind of test on this ((inaudible)) just kind of realistic is that the wolves up here in the Great Lakes State can repopulate anything much beyond the Dakotas.

Nancy Gibson: Dick (respond to that) or Dave.

Dave Mech: Yes, I'll take it. Even the Dakotas are questionable. I mean, I feel that there's some places in the Dakotas where wolf population might be able to live without causing too much damage then therefore being wiped out either well, sort of ((inaudible)) if no other way because that happens all the time and but, you know, often South Dakota would be the only neighbors of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan that I think stand any chance of having a reproducing wolf population.

There have been wolves dispersing from the Upper Midwest into Illinois and Indiana almost Ohio and possibly one into Kentucky and possibly one in the New York State. I mean, there's evidence for that. We're not absolutely sure that – about – but genetically, it looks like the one

that showed up in New York State came from – came from Upper Midwest and same thing with Kentucky.

So, the wolves are (getting out) down. They've been – they've gotten down into Missouri I think as well but, you know, they get killed when they get down there and because this is just too populated and they either get hit by cars or they kill somebody's dog or threaten somebody or whatever – hunters mistaken for coyotes – in any case, they get killed, and overall these years, they're like – the last 20 years when they've been disperses from the Upper Midwest, so far none of them have taken route in any of the adjacent states.

I think that's fair evidence that probably with – even with total protection for the next five or 10 years. They probably also would not take routes in any other states except conceivably in some spots in South and North Dakota.

Mike Phillips: But Nancy – (this allows) Steve. I want to – I want to jump into, Mike Phillips here that that – this gets to the national components of this decision. The Endangered Species Act allows for more than just naturally conversation and Dave makes a great point that I completely agree with. I don't think werewolves in the Great Lake States are going to naturally colonize much more of the U.S. However, continued protections on Endangered Species Act allow the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to move forward of reintroductions which we know worked and we know that there's large tracks of highly suitable habitat in the Rocky Mountains that remained unoccupied.

The best example of this the Western half of Colorado which on every biological metric that matters is that (variable) amount of load of opportunity for gray wolves. So, whereas Steve, I don't think Dave is (at least wrong) describing minimal opportunity for natural re-conversation due to (disperse) of the Great Lake States, having the Endangered Species Act continue to have relevance to gray wolves across the United States and lead to Great Recovery Act.

Yes and I agree with Mike that there's several places out last where that have – that are wolf-free, right now, that certainly could support wolves and Western Colorado is certainly one of them.

Nancy Gibson: All right. Another question?

Josephine Marcotty: This is Josephine, again, from the Star Tribune. I wonder if one or all of you could address sort of what you think is going to happen next in terms of the Fish and Wildlife Service either redoing this rule or appealing this decision. I mean, what do you think are the next legal steps or the next legal consequences of this?

Nancy Gibson: And Rick Duncan who's an attorney, do you want to step on this, too?

Rick Duncan: Sure. Well, the Fish and Wildlife Service will have 30 days to actually the federal government I think they could pick the day to decide if they'll filing appeal that, you know, at present you've had – you've had to ask them that they probably haven't decided.

You know, I – they have – I guess, as a practical matter, the judge's ruling came down after the hunting seasons were wrapped up in Wisconsin and Minnesota and so there's ((inaudible)) here until next fall if they want to try to do something. I think that's probably a little bit ambitious. So, I expect their next steps will be to decide if they want to appeal in which case (absent) some extraordinary event, the judge's order would stay in place while that appeal goes on and that's about a two-year process or they will I guess sort of take the (heart) with Mike Phillips was saying that a new approach – a new regulatory approach is needed that they have not had success legally with their efforts to delist the wolf in the Upper Great Lake States.

And then I guess the question is as I read the judge's order, the wolves were verged to endangered status in Michigan and Wisconsin and I think it doesn't (say this) but probably back

that threatened status in Minnesota and so I supposed the Fish and Wildlife Service would need to study whether they would want to try to put the Wisconsin and Michigan populations under threatened status as well with what – which would allow for control but it would be – it would be, you know, controlled by government trappers rather than – and private hunting.

So, there is that middle ground that they I guess could still explore and so that's kind of the, you know, what to expect I guess in the next, you know, coming months up until next fall.

Mike Phillips: But the judge's ruling just seen also reinstates an endangered status in the Dakotas, Illinois, the several other states were caught up in this Great Lakes distinct population segment and...

Nancy Gibson: (Right).

Mike Phillips: ... (so) to go back too and the service has to do some soul-searching. They are about all for everything over the last decade in (Dakota) and, you know, if Japan is ((inaudible)) we keep come up short. What is it about our logic this seems to be fundamentally flawed. Moreover, it's fair to conclude that it may be fundamentally flawed because they've now been in front of several different courts. It's not like the (enviros) have fixed some sympathetic (judge), and they keep getting the one judge to keep making that same kind of ruling.

This is – this is not consistent, and I think it would be time for the service to take (stock) and say, maybe the basic or more approach were coming short. Moreover, Josephine, it wouldn't surprise me to see legal action now to readdress the delisting and that Northern Rocky Mountains as Dave alluded to, Congress got – the United States Senate got involved and they have set the delisting in the Northern Rocky Mountains by attaching a (rider) to a defense budget deal (fill) and that wasn't noble enough.

They then – we're going to shield that decision from judicial review. We're in the (whole) method I'm going to take from the American public the right district (redressing) court, that's a pretty big deal. Somebody maybe willing to push a little hard in the whole logic, that frame, the delisting in the Northern Rocky Mountains giving the – given the logic that the judge has put forth on the Great Lakes and then finally, I would have you believe that the service's vision for wolf recovery that was advanced now probably about two years ago or 18 months ago, this national threat that we – they should be rethinking that too because I suspect this ruling suggest that that national (vision) is going to come up short as well.

Nancy Gibson: OK. Another question? All gone? I'd like to...

Female: So...

Nancy Gibson: All right.

Female: I was hoping that maybe Dr. Mech could give us some kind of an explanation on the species, subspecies arguments in the judge's decision. The – this – sort of the distinction between the Great Lakes wolf and the Rocky Mountain wolf and that two kind of fell apart under – in this process but I wonder they – I guess the simple question is are there different species at Great Lakes...

Dave Mech: No.

Female: ...or they just...

(Crosstalk)

Dave Mech: No, no, no. And you can ask all the other biologist as well. Ask Mike and ask that this is all the same animal.

Mike Phillips: Now, fundamental and Dave and I just did great a lot and for the part I completely agree with Dave. I've even stated public that that the best scientific (monitor) for the gray wolf may well be *Canis lupus* irregardless. But there's very good science that says, you know what sometimes, the subspecies are recognizable in the lab. We know for example that *Canis lupus baileyi*, the Mexican wolf is consistently identifiable in a Genetics Lab as slightly (gift).

Dave Mech: Except for the latest – except for the latest publication last week for (Matt Cronin) which has...

Mike Phillips: And of course, (Cronin's) work is being shortly – I've been talking (Bob Wayne) and I working on something. Bob, a geneticist from UCLA that will push back on the (Cronin's) findings and Dave makes a good point. This goes back and forth and back and forth and back forth. But here's something that everybody should be mindful of this quite often overlooked they never recognize in the first place, when you read the House Report in 1973, that's (framed) the passage of the law in the first place.

Congress made (sharp) reference to the need to conserve genetics. Even if we don't know why the genetics are different or the difference has made any difference in the field, they still – the Congress didn't say we want to preserve genetics that make a difference in the field. They simply said we want to preserve genetics and consequently, when you're looking at how log gets implemented, it congressional intent really matters.

When the Executive (wonders) had implement – when the Judiciary wonders had interpret, they both are fairly advised to look at legislative intent and it was clear that legislative intent in the early 1970s was preserved genetics and so it's (non-level) Josephine genes matter.

Dave Mech: But even in the last generation of the – of the – if you do believe in subspecies, even the last generation no acts, it shows that wolves in Minnesota and in the Northern Rocky's are the same.

Mike Phillips: OK. And yes, Josephine, Dave is actually right. Moreover, the very careful review of the services recent (days) that was published by 18 months ago, our colleagues have spent a lot of times thinking about genetics. (Summarily) set aside the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (debrief) them for (taxon) as it relates to gray wolf.

They tried to come up with some final answer. So, what is the gray wolf and the pros or bits – our colleagues are saying the service came up short. So, even if we only recognize *Canis lupus* and we only look at the gray wolf as the gray wolf. You could still see where they judge here today that we're discussing what's fair in concluding that four *Canis lupus*. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has come up short because they haven't done a proper job explaining all of the rational that has to attend delist.

Nancy Gibson: Dick, do you have any to add to that?

Dick Thiel: I agree with both of them.

Nancy Gibson: OK.

Dave Mech: Nancy, you got time for more questions here?

Nancy Gibson: Yes.

(John Meier): (John Meier) ((inaudible)) in the loop and maybe I'll have Dr. Mech start with this but maybe others can chime in at. What this decision as it is now – I mean, what's the future of wolf

management in – do we have to wait for an appeal to go two years that we have to wait for the (unaided) federal agency to re-decide its total wolf national management plan and that – which can live both of those cases that are going to take long-term. What's going to happen on the ground in these states – (what) do you think?

Dave Mech: Well...

Nancy Gibson: Dave?

Dave Mech: ... I think there's going to be – I think there's going to be more illegal (taking) and there's some indication of that I understand from my colleague in Michigan that that's going on right now. I think in Minnesota, there's not so much because there is a season when – there was a season when (most) could be taken legally but I think that, you know, some people and, you know, Mike mentioned wolves are – or people are very passionate on both sides of the issue and some of the people that are passionate that went to see wolves off the list.

Some of those well I think will be taking more wolves illegally especially if this – if this decision persist through the next hunting season. It's very, very easy for, you know, 100,000 deer hunters out there setting their stance and then a wolf runs by very easy for someone to shoot one of them and never even walk up to the wolf. I mean, that has happened in the past then I think they'll be more of that in the future it stays under federal listing.

Mike Phillips: I'd like to add that for Wisconsin which is ((inaudible)) first about Dave's comments should not be taken – I don't think they would (concur) with this but because we have seasons that did not mean that there was no illegal take of wolf. We have put the documentation in Wisconsin on a continued illegal take of wolf.

Dave Mech: Oh, sure, sure.

Mike Phillips: It's not a swinging (gape) either or. So, that will still persist but I think the level of that animosity is probably going to increase in Wisconsin (basically for certain). One of the things that's going to happen in Wisconsin is that with the State of Wisconsin is presently in the midst of redefining or especially rewriting their state management plan. The question that brings to mind to me at least is that the Fish and Wildlife Service that delisting one of the hoops they have to jump through is approval of state – respective state's management plan.

And if Wisconsin management plan that will be rewritten significantly deviates from the plan that was approved, the question I would have is this Fish and Wildlife Service they then require to reevaluate the new plan. So having said that that is just something that to throw out there, the State of Wisconsin is now going to be listed as in – the wolf is going to be listed endangered so essentially on the short term it's the mood point whatever is in the plan if it has a (pool) of harvest cannot be implemented so such time is Fish and Wildlife for this either downlist or delist and probability will be delisting before we could have a harvest.

If the ball is back in Fish and Wildlife Service's Court, at the present time now, Wisconsin will not be able to take wolves that are depredating on livestock unless there's some real dire need to do so.

We have good history of that in Wisconsin over the last three years while they work that with endangered where we really didn't have that authority to take so the population we will not be able to respond effectively to livestock depredation.

History over the last three years, the only time we really look to the enrolled was only the official public safety so we're going to be going back to that type of management. I believe at least and I would say that this is going to be the same thing in Michigan since they will be treated the same. They'll both be listed in endangered.

The angst and what not in Michigan is a little bit less in terms of livestock because there aren't much livestock in the UP, but in any event there is certainly an undercurrent in both states. It's pretty good (standing off) the ((inaudible)) against the wolf that has (arisen) quite frankly in the last decade while all of its federal lawsuits played it out and so with that I think we're - we're going to go back to that at the short term until the Fish and Wildlife (drew a shorter) current, but there would be the opportunity if gray wolves can be listed as threat in ((inaudible)).

There'll be opportunities that allow for a similar designation to attend fairly soon to gray wolves in Wisconsin and Michigan. A threatening status allows for the development of very accommodating Section 4(d) rule. As you all may know, the law defines prohibited acts for endangered species, it does not define prohibited acts for threatened species.

Prohibited acts are defined on a case by case basis per Section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act so there would be a way to respond to the pressing needs of Wisconsin and Michigan. Moreover, I suspect (Davis) write about an increase in illegal (fate).

If that's the case, you as journalist could point out to the readers that's exactly what you would want to do if you wanted to perpetuate status quo, which you apparently find unacceptable. The last thing you want to do now is brought and take medicine to your own hands that's not going to help lead to resolution.

And I would challenge the journalist to recognize that if you write about this just in the context of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan the whole thing seems very silly. How in the world can anybody argue that 2,000 plus gray wolves in Minnesota are endangered or threatened or anything other than (secured) well you can't because there's (Dr. Mattson) who knows more about the stuff than anybody just explain you can't. It has to do with the whole bunch of other

stuff part of which of which Minnesota is a part, but in the context of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, this decision is very hard to understand and justify.

Nancy Gibson: OK. I just - We try to get Dr. Rolf Peterson on this call and he could not make it, but he sent me an e-mail about Michigan and he said "it might be different from Wisconsin and Minnesota in terms of the legal status."

He checked with the Michigan DNR yesterday and Michigan wolves are not endangered, not threatened at Minnesota. Lethal control be possible with the 10(a)(1)(A) permit from U.S. Wildlife Service and our problem is getting any more of this from the service.

Mike Phillips: And let me talk. We've secured through the turning - we're going to turn endangered species going a host of 10(a)(1)(A) research in survival and asked for permits and if the state can make a case to the federal government that by controlling gray wolves in cases or situations where there are problems they are effectively helping gray wolves throughout the state well than they would otherwise that would be the bottom line rationale for a 10(a)(1)(A) permit, but you as journalist can recognize now we're still (deep into the weeds) of the ESA, I'm not sure readers will be able to keep up.

Josephine Marcotty: But Mike, this is Josephine. I think your point is that the - that the Fish and Wildlife Service has to come up with - has to come up with a national solution and a natural - and a national recovery plan, is that what you...

Mike Phillips: And Josephine I don't see, yes, I don't see how they're going to figure this out in a manner that withstands judicial scrutiny otherwise and I will say Dave and myself and others had been advocating for a national plan for a long time going back to ((inaudible)) of the Yellowstone Wolf Project where we said "gees what would it look like with a national plan for the gray wolf, would that give some rhyme and reason that would satisfy reasonable people and would stand up to

judicial review” and yet today Josephine we still can’t sign to a document, a body of work that would say here’s the national vision, here’s how it all sits and (consorts) with the spirit and intent of the Endangered Species Act.

Dick Thiel: This is Dick Thiel. I agree with that viewpoint entirely. I think a national plan would service an umbrella that could drive some of the individuality of these regions and yet have the connectedness to show the national - the direction that the nation chooses to go with managing and recovering wolves in the United States of America. I think it’s essential.

Nancy Gibson: All right. More questions?

(Eric Ahlberg): I have a question.

Nancy Gibson: Suggestions? Yes.

(Eric Ahlberg): My name is (Eric) - My name is (Eric Ahlberg) and...

Nancy Gibson: Yes.

(Eric Ahlberg): ... I just kind of want to follow up on the national plan if you will. I don’t want to put words in anybody’s mouth so are you suggesting that if you look at just Minnesota by itself or Wisconsin by itself or Michigan by itself could you expand on that side just to make - I want to make sure that I - that I don’t make an assumption here. It sounds like you’re saying that if you look at those states individually it would be - it would be easy to say that the population is healthy, but if you look at it nationally does it - does the perspective change them? Is the - Is the national population not as healthy as that state? Is that what you’re getting at or am I misunderstanding?

Nancy Gibson: Mike you want to answer for that or Dave?

Mike Phillips: Sure I can - I can clarify (Eric). Certainly in state like Minnesota, the populations are healthy and that's a fair way to describe it so everybody can understand.

Nationwide, the gray wolves still occupies 15% of this historical range (being generous), which means it's absent, absent. It's not unhealthy (Eric) it's absent from 85% of the range and of that 85% there's big areas where they could easily - where gray wolves could easily occupy in a healthy way and the service hasn't come up with a good solid science-based answer to explain why some pieces of this big puzzle are largely being ignored and I think the answer to that question it puts Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho in a proper national content and would allow for a more coordinated approach going forward, but (there lies) (Eric) it's not just the population that are unhealthy, they don't exist. The ((inaudible))...

Dave Mech: However...

Mike Phillips: ... of the gray wolves itself...

Dave Mech: Go ahead Mike finish.

Mike Phillips: I'm sorry. No, I'm done Dave. Thank you.

Dave Mech: OK. However, I think that I certainly agree that the population - I would state the population of wolves in the 48 states is healthy and I agree with Mike there could be other places where they could live.

If you took this to an extreme, however, yes wolves live in a very small percentage of where they used to live. They used to live in the whole 48 states. They can't live in many of those places.

Let's just put this in terms of bisons. Where do bisons live? Bison used to live all of - all the way across to the mountains and if we were to restore bison to their original range they'd be in a wheat field all over the farms and stuff, this is not practical. Now, the law might require that if the bison were on the list, but you have to bring reason and common sense into it and I think that's what the Fish and Wildlife Service is trying to do.

I know Mike doesn't agree that they've done it well enough. I tend to think that they have. This is where Mike and I disagree. I think with the - with the thousands of wolves in the Upper Midwest and both the 2,000 in the - in the Northern Rockies and a budding population of over 80 wolves and increasing in the Southwest I think that's a healthy population of wolves in the 48 states.

Mike Phillips: And (Eric) let me add, they couldn't be more rights. I'll also add that it doesn't matter what he thinks or what I think really what matters what a judge thinks and so far the judge - judges are consistently concluding the services coming up short and they're coming up short because of this simple phrase significant portion of range that's very, very hard to really understand and act against and while Dave is right there's going to be large areas of the gray wolves historical range where the species simply can't exist any longer.

I've had an e-mail exchange with Dave recently and we both recognize Illinois is forever lost to gray wolves. I agree so maybe it should say - the law should say significant portion of range where habitat remains suitable or can (practicably) be made so, but the service still hasn't even answered that question. What makes for example Western Colorado insignificant? Because it is not insignificant, but rather significant than it should be the subject of recovery consideration, which they've never done.

So at some level what this all speaks to is a lack of sufficient due diligence on the - on the part of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and I think the judges keep coming up with this recognition that - that due diligence is insufficient. You can look on Page 95 of the ruling, the last

sentence of the first section on Page 95 of that rule. It should fundamentally say the service hasn't provided an adequate answer. I think that speaks to due diligence.

(Eric Ahlberg): OK.

Mike Phillips: And you know what we publish this all the journalists, they recognize maybe the Endangered Species Act asked too much of us. If that's the case, congress needs to amend it, but until it's amended it is a very demanding law.

Nancy Gibson: OK. More questions?

Male: Just a quick question followup on folks even feel about the decline in wolf's numbers in Wisconsin based on their annual harvest for the last year and whether or not that was more rapid than folks may have believed it, I mean it looks like more than 25% pre-hunt, possibly 40% post-hunt decline in their overall wolf numbers, is that all concerning to folks? Did we get - Were we too good at taking these animals?

Female: Yes.

Dick Thiel: Well if that's the way the Wisconsin hunt has been to decrease the population from the pre-hunt days, 2011-2012 where the census suggests that they were about 850 wolves their task so they see it is to take that possibly down the management - the 1999 state managers' goal of 350 so however quickly they get there or how (long) they get there the point is that's what they want to accomplish and so I'm not sure if I'm answering your question correctly, but the harvest that they've developed, the quotas that they came up with had the specific intent of dropping that population down as rapidly as possible and going to last year with the harvest of 257 wolves they are able to takeout about 20% of this winter to winter population so that is what the state manager drive is all about and they set about with quotas to accomplish that task and indeed they've seen

a positive reflection on that management curve meaning that the population will turn at the direction they want to save, which is down.

Male: Was the 350 approved as under the federal decision? Was that number a part?

Dick Thiel: Correct and that was incidentally based on the 1999 State of Wisconsin management plan.

At the time of the writing, we had about 250 wolves.

Male: Right, but it was approved in the 2012 final decision, the 350 was essentially approved for the management plan.

Dick Thiel: Correct and that said...

Male: Would you think if we had a - if we had a biological reason for wolves crashing 70% we would - we would do something about it, but...

Dick Thiel: The caveat there though is that the state the wolf management plan of the State of Wisconsin is silent to having a public harvest. That was legislated. It was not part of an administrative drive at the time it was written in 1999.

There is mention of the possibility of having a public harvest in the 1999 State Plan. I know that because I helped write it, but it was something that was visionary rather than concrete and so the plan that was actually approved by Fish and Wildlife Service has mentioned of the inclusion of a public harvest.

Dave Mech: If I can give a little perspective to that, some context, the wolf recovery plan for the Upper Midwest that is the plan that set the criteria - the biological criteria for delisting the wolf calls for only a hundred wolves in Michigan and Wisconsin combined for five consecutive years so in

terms of the way things were seen this first plan was written in and was approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1978 and then reapproved in 1992 the way the situation was seen in those early days if Michigan and Wisconsin could have a hundred wolves between the two of them for five consecutive years that would be considered recovery as long - so long as Minnesota had a minimum of 1,250 so those were the standards that were agreed to even agreed to by the environmentalists at that time.

Male: But not in the 2012 final listing I mean in the final listing.

Dave Mech: Right.

Male: The final listing.

Dave Mech: But no, but just it's - it's of value to have some perspective on that because like Dick said in 1999 when they set - when Wisconsin set its goal for 350 that was thought to be a really boy if we could reach 350 that would be great, well they're at 800 now so these things changed, but it's - it's of importance to understand the whole context of the - of the recovery.

Dick Thiel: Again if I can mention too what Dave was doing as a followup is that the Fish and Wildlife Service approved the State of Wisconsin manager plan because it set 350 and as Dave has just pointed out to you that 350 is actually 250 above what was considered to be recovery goal for both a joint - a joint or shared population in Wisconsin and Michigan so if the State of Wisconsin wants to drive the population down to 350, which is its current intent it still is far above (probably) the federal recovery plan for his DPS and so the point it's still above that standard and until that standard changes it's accessible.

Mike Phillips: Yes, but now - but and I say this to the journalist they can and Dave and I had this conversation before what the United States Fish and Wildlife Service says on Monday may not

have ((inaudible)) they can (make) a difference on Friday, the ultimate ((inaudible)) that the sufficiency of all of this is the court and it may be in the presence of a court consideration the recovery plan that Dave and Dick are referencing may be found to be insufficient.

For example if you read the plan put together by top like biologists that know the species inside out and clearly have a good sense of these demographic needs, its viability needs, there's no discussion of significant portion of range.

There's no discussion of the geographical component of recovery even though it's clear that the law has a geographical component. A judge could conclude that while we have no doubt werewolves are viable in the (Great Lakes states). They will list - They will exist from (Monday through Monday).

They still do not yet occupy a significant portion of range or conversely there's still extra (patent) from a significant portion of range so the ESA continues to (apply) and so you know you guys should be mindful that the courts in this country because we have the right to seek redress. The courts have tremendous influence and I think are fairly consider the ultimate ((inaudible)).

Nancy Gibson: OK. Thank you. Any more burning questions before we end this press conference?

Female: And I'm good. Thanks Nancy. Thanks for setting it up.

Nancy Gibson: You're very welcome and I just want to remind everybody that these are not the opinions of the International Wolf Center. We are providing the forum for you. It is recorded. It will be on our website, www.wolf.org shortly in case you are confused and will have a clarity there.

With that, I want to thank the panel members, Dr. Dave Mech, Mike Phillips, Dick Thiel and the attorney, Rick Duncan all of you so thank you very much.

END