



NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION®
People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

Immediate Release:
September 25, 2003

Contact:
John Kostyack – 202-797-6879
Peggy Struhsacker – 802-272-1244
Mary Burnette – 703-438-6097

NWF Pursues Legal Action to Ensure Wolf Recovery in the Northeast

MONTPELIER, VT. - Charging that the Bush administration's decision to abandon wolf recovery efforts in the Northeast violates the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) announced today that it intends to take legal action. In its 60-day notice of intent to sue, NWF explains that the final Wolf Reclassification Rule that was issued in April effectively terminates federal wolf recovery efforts in the Northeast, where suitable wolf habitat exists and wolves are apparently beginning to return.

The rule changes the status of wolves from endangered to threatened in the Northern Rockies and the Great Lakes while removing ESA protection for wolves in states like Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, where no wolf recovery has taken place to date. NWF asserts in the 60-day letter that the administration declared victory for gray wolf recovery based solely on the Northern Rockies and Great Lakes wolf populations which is in direct violation of its ESA obligation to prevent extinction across a "significant portion" of the wolf's range.

"Although the thriving wolf populations in the Great Lakes and Northern Rockies are indeed wildlife success stories, they cannot be used as an excuse for abandoning the goal of wolf recovery in the Northeast," said Eric Palola, Director of NWF's Northeast Natural Resource Center in Montpelier, Vermont. "Lumping the Northeast into the successful wolf recovery efforts in the Great Lakes and Northern Rockies is analogous to citing high literacy rates in Minnesota and Idaho to demonstrate that children in New England can read."

Today, the wolf can be found on just three percent of its historic range in the lower 48 states and millions of acres of former habitat remain potentially available for wolf restoration. There have been several reports of wolves from Canada crossing the

– **MORE** –

NWF to Sue over Wolf Plan

September 25, 2003

Page 2

frozen St. Lawrence Seaway into Maine, Vermont and just north of New Hampshire in recent years. By terminating the federal recovery program in the Northeast, NWF asserts that the administration reduces the likelihood that wolves migrating southward from Canada will be able to establish a viable population in the sparsely populated regions of Maine, despite the suitability of its habitat and availability of a prey base.

“Rather than walk away from pursuing wolf recovery in the Northeast, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should be educating people about how wolves contribute to a healthy environment for the Northern forests and working to establish agreements with Canada and among the states where habitat exists,” says Palola.

In a proposed rule issued in 2000 during the Clinton Administration, the Fish and Wildlife Service called for recovering Northeast wolves, explaining that “a population of gray wolves in [the Northeast] is *significant* and will contribute to the overall restoration of the species.” Scientific peer reviewers uniformly supported this proposal. However, in the final rule, the Bush administration abandoned Northeast wolf recovery without addressing these earlier statements according to NWF.

“The administration’s plan is illegal and contrary to what all of the scientific experts recommend for wolf recovery,” said John Kostyack, NWF Senior Counsel for Wildlife Conservation and lead counsel in the forthcoming lawsuit. “The Fish and Wildlife Service has an obligation under the ESA to recover wolves in a significant portion of their historic range, and this includes the forests of the Northeast states.”

“The Fish and Wildlife Service should build on its successful wolf recovery efforts to date in the Northern Rockies and Great Lakes region to form partnerships for recovery on suitable landscapes in the Northeastern states where recovery is feasible,” said Ann MacMichael of the Maine Wolf Coalition, one of the groups joining the legal notice.

“NWF's legal action targets the Northeast because wolf recovery in this region doesn't stand a chance without a reversal of this portion of the administration’s rule,” said Peggy Struhsacker, Program Coordinator for Wolf Recovery in NWF’s Montpelier, Vermont office. “The howl of the wolf has been missing too long from the Northern

NWF to Sue over Wolf Plan

September 25, 2003

Page 3

forests and our national wolf recovery efforts cannot be declared complete while that gap remains.”

A recent poll conducted by Henry P. Kendall Foundation showed that 63 percent of northern New Englanders believe it is important to have wolves for the balance of nature.

Joining NWF in their intent to sue are: Maine Wolf Coalition, Skowhegan, Maine; Vermont Natural Resources Council, Montpelier, Vermont; Environmental Advocates of New York, Albany, New York.

A member-supported conservation education and advocacy group, the National Wildlife Federation unites people from all walks of life to protect nature, wildlife and the world we all share. The Federation has educated and inspired families to uphold America’s conservation tradition since 1936.

###