

For Immediate Release: July 2, 2020

****Media contacts listed at end of press release****

Feds Agree to Decide on Endangered Species Protections for Wolverine by August 31
Settlement orders U.S. Fish & Wildlife to act following four years delay

MISSOULA, Mont.— The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be required to decide whether wolverines in the lower-48 states should be protected under the Endangered Species Act by Aug. 31, 2020, in accordance with a [legal agreement](#) filed in court today with conservation groups.

The agreement stems from a lawsuit that conservation organizations filed in March to prod the agency to determine the fate of wolverines after four years of delay. That delay followed a 2016 court ruling that directed the Service to take action on requests to grant legal protection to the wolverine “at the earliest possible, defensible moment in time,” stressing that “[f]or the wolverine, that time is now.”

“Recent scientific information has underscored that wolverines face threats from trapping, disruption of their winter range, and – most of all – destruction of their snowy habitat due to climate change,” said **Tim Preso, Earthjustice attorney**, who represented the conservation groups in the lawsuit. “It is past time for the government to take action to preserve this iconic species.”

There are fewer than 300 wolverines left in the contiguous United States. The animals are severely threatened by climate change, which reduces the spring snowpack they need for denning, and habitat loss caused by snowmobiles, roads and other development. Protection under the Endangered Species Act would trigger new conservation efforts for wolverines.

The agreement resolves a lawsuit filed by Earthjustice on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, Conservation Northwest, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the Clearwater, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Idaho Conservation League, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center and Rocky Mountain Wild.

“We’re hopeful the Service will recognize that Endangered Species Act protection is needed to put these rare and imperiled animals on the road to recovery,” said **Andrea Zaccardi, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity**. “Federal protection for wolverines is long overdue.”

“Wolverines are legendary for the ferocious spirit that we all need to embody in order to protect our ecosystems and communities,” said **Skye Schell, executive director of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance**. “So it pains us to know that wolverines are ever-more threatened by habitat loss and now climate change. We call on the Fish and Wildlife Service to put science over politics and finally give wolverines the protections they deserve under the Endangered Species Act.”

“If you’ve ever seen a wolverine in the wild, you’re one of a very lucky few,” said **Brad Smith of the Idaho Conservation League**. “We’re fortunate to have them in Idaho, but their numbers are critically low. Let’s not lose these iconic wild animals when we have the means to ensure they receive the protections they need to survive.”

“Climate change and habitat fragmentation are pushing wolverines to the brink,” said **Jonathan Proctor, Rockies and Plains program director at Defenders of Wildlife**. “The Fish and Wildlife Service has a moral and legal obligation to protect these animals, and we are here to ensure it performs its duty without further delay.”

“The decline of the wolverine on the West Coast is telling us that we must take bold action to stop climate change,” said **Joseph Vaile of the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center**. “Without deep snowpack, the wolverine’s range will continue to retract until it winks out entirely.”

“The Clearwater Basin is prime wolverine habitat and has a population of this rare species, yet it is threatened by global warming and the actions of the Forest Service,” said **Gary Macfarlane of Friends of the Clearwater**. “The newly released Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests draft forest plan would endanger security habitat for wolverines.”

“While wolverine are as tough and rugged as their wilderness home, they face dire threats from a warming climate, shrinking snowpack, and an increasingly fragmented habitat,” said **Dave Werntz, science and conservation director at Conservation Northwest**. “Endangered Species Act protections will help marshal the resources and recovery actions to ensure wolverine have a future in the west’s wild country.”

[ONLINE VERSION OF THIS RELEASE](#)

Legal Documents:

[Settlement agreement](#)

[Joint Motion to Dismiss](#)

[Proposed Order](#)

BACKGROUND: Wolverines, the largest land-dwelling members of the weasel family, once roamed across the northern tier of the United States and as far south as New Mexico in the Rockies and Southern California in the Sierra Nevada range. After more than a century of trapping and habitat loss, wolverines in the lower 48 today exist only as small, fragmented populations in Idaho, Montana, Washington, Wyoming and northeast Oregon.

With no more than 300 wolverines remaining in these regions, the species is at direct risk from climate change. Wolverines depend on areas with deep snow through late spring. Pregnant females dig their dens into this snowpack to birth and raise their young. Snowpack is already in decline in the western mountains, a trend that is predicted to worsen with a warming climate.

Wolverine populations are also at risk from trapping, human disturbance, extremely low population numbers resulting in low genetic diversity, and fragmentation of their habitat. Without new conservation efforts the dangers faced by wolverines threaten remaining populations with localized extinctions and inbreeding.

Media Contacts: Tim Preso, Earthjustice, (406) 586-9699, tpreso@earthjustice.org
 Andrea Zaccardi, Center for Biological Diversity, (303) 854-7748,
 azaccardi@biologicaldiversity.org
 Dave Werntz, Conservation Northwest, (360) 319-9949,
 dwerntz@conservationnw.org
Jonathan Proctor, Defenders of Wildlife, (720) 943-0451
Gary Macfarlane, Friends of the Clearwater, (208) 882-9755
Chris Colligan, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, (307) 734-0633
Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League, (208) 265-9565
Skye Schell, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, (307) 733-9417,
skye@jhalliance.org
Joseph Vaile, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, (541) 488-5789
Paige Singer, Rocky Mountain Wild, (303) 454-3340,
paige@rockymountainwild.org

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