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# Securing an Ecologically Functioning Population of Wolves in Idaho's Big Wild

## Big Wild Initiative II – Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity

August 2026

**Leadership**

Friends of the Clearwater (FOC), Nez Perce Tribe, and regional conservation partners

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**Executive Summary**

The Big Wild of central Idaho represents the largest remaining interconnected wildland complex in the continental United States. This globally significant landscape provides essential habitat for wide-ranging wildlife, safeguards ecological processes at landscape scales, and sustains cultural connections that have endured for millennia. Wolves are a keystone species within this ecosystem, helping maintain ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, and contributing to the resilience of interconnected wildlife communities.

Although wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies stands among North America's greatest conservation achievements, recent management changes (bounties, overharvest, unsportsmanlike chase) have increased pressures on wolf populations and raised concerns about the long-term security of ecologically functional populations in Idaho. As mortality increases and habitat connectivity becomes increasingly degraded, the Big Wild offers one of the best opportunities in the Lower 48 states to maintain wolves in a landscape large enough to support natural behaviors, social structure, genetic exchange, and ecological function.

The **Citizens Idaho Wolf Security Initiative** will bring together Friends of the Clearwater, the Nez Perce Tribe, conservation organizations, researchers, land managers, and local communities to secure and strengthen wolf populations throughout the Big Wild. Through science-based monitoring, conflict-prevention programs, corridor conservation, public engagement, and Tribal partnerships, the initiative will ensure that wolves continue to play their essential ecological role while building durable support for coexistence.

Over five years, the initiative will:

- Secure ecologically and socially functioning wolf populations in Idaho's Big Wild.
- Protect and strengthen critical wildlife corridors connecting Idaho and Montana.
- Reduce human-caused mortality in key movement and dispersal areas.

- Expand education of nonlethal coexistence tools for livestock and rural communities.
- Elevate public understanding of wolves' ecological, cultural, and economic value.
- Strengthen collaborative conservation leadership with the Nez Perce Tribe and regional partners.

By combining rigorous science, practical coexistence strategies, and community-based conservation, this initiative will help ensure that the Big Wild remains a stronghold for wolves and a model for large-landscape conservation across North America.

This initiative is one of a series that aims to conserve and reconnect and make whole one of the largest intact ecosystems in North America, supporting imperiled species, restoring ecological function, and honoring Indigenous and historical use of the landscape.

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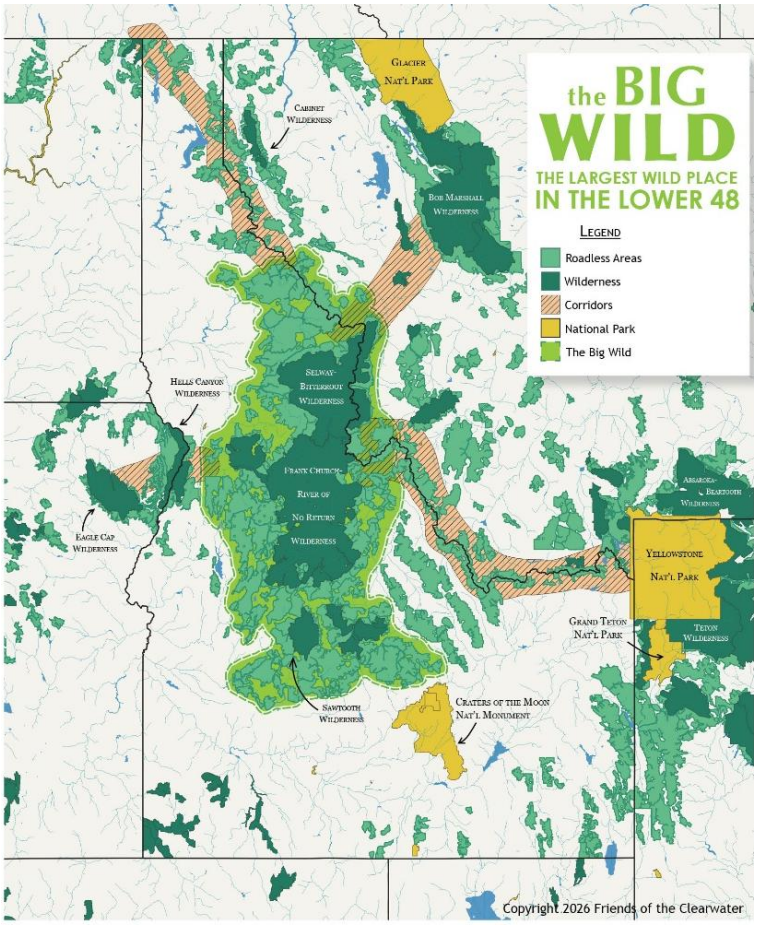
**Background: The Big Wild**

The area known as the Big Wild is actually two adjacent wild regions. Clearwater Country is a land of moist cedar-fir forests and lower elevation mountains. This is where Friends of the Clearwater has focused its efforts. Salmon River Country is a higher, drier region of ponderosa break lands and glacier-carved peaks. They are joined by the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. Our core region, Wild Clearwater Country, contains 3 million acres of wilderness and roadless forest. Altogether, the entire region covers more than 10 million contiguous acres of wild, undeveloped country, making it larger than Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks combined. This unique and irreplaceable region, jointly owned by all of us, is rich in biodiversity. Friends of the Clearwater will secure the largest intact wildland preserve in the contiguous United States for biodiversity and climate health with 3 Initiatives: I. Wild Salmon Sanctuary, **II. Carnivore Corridors**, III. Forest and Climate.

The Big Wild has been central to Friends of the Clearwater's mission since 1987, and a core focus of the proposed legislation, Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA).
https://allianceforthewildrockies.org/nrepa/

The Big Wild connects to major wildland complexes, including:

- Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (east)
- Glacier Park and Bob Marshall ecosystems (northeast)
- Hells Canyon and Wallowa Mountains (west)
- Selkirk, Cabinet-Yaak, (north)




*These connections make the area essential for wide-ranging wildlife species and long-term biodiversity resilience.*

**The Big Wild Initiative II - Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity**

**We will secure the largest, most intact, most abundant and most diverse carnivore preserve in the nation, thereby ensuring the greatest possible diversity of other species as well.**

To create and maintain carnivore connectivity across The Big Wild, FOC will work to:

- Protect all Identified Roadless Areas;
- Expand and enhance protections and systems to create protected north/south and east/west travel corridors for threatened and endangered carnivores;
- Enhance carnivore survival by increasing coexistence
- Inventory and map threatened and endangered carnivores to help prioritize our efforts;
- Partner with other organizations across both the Clearwater and Salmon Country to advocate for any or all ESA-listed mammals that (will) use these corridors.

**Vision: Citizens Idaho Wolf Security Initiative**

A future in which wolves thrive as an ecologically functional component of Idaho's Big Wild landscape, moving freely through connected habitats, contributing to healthy ecosystems, and coexisting with communities that recognize their ecological, cultural, and economic value.

**Conservation Need and Opportunity**

Wolves require large, connected landscapes to maintain healthy populations. Their long-term persistence depends not only on adequate habitat but also on connectivity between populations, opportunities for dispersal, and the ability to maintain natural social structures and genetic diversity.

The Big Wild remains uniquely positioned to provide these conditions. As the largest wildland complex in the Lower 48 states, it contains extensive wilderness areas, roadless landscapes, and relatively intact ecological processes. The region functions as an important source area for wildlife and serves as a critical linkage connecting the broader Northern Rockies ecosystem.

Despite these advantages, current pressures from the state of Idaho threaten the long-term security of wolves and other carnivores. Science and best conservation practices for wolves are ignored more than for any other species. Excessive human-caused mortality and habitat fragmentation along dispersal pathways reduce ecological resilience and weaken connectivity across the landscape. Without proactive efforts to address these challenges, the ecological role of wolves and the broader integrity of the Big Wild ecosystem are compromised.

The Nez Perce Tribe has long recognized wolves as integral components of healthy landscapes and cultural traditions. When asked if Idaho wolf management was violation of their Treaty, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee Chairman Shannon Wheeler said. “Is it a violation of something that we were meant to protect? Of course it is. Of course it’s a violation of what was here in 1855 and before then. And that’s a part of tamáalwit, or the unwritten law, which we know that Article Three and the Treaty of 1855 with the Nez Perce represents.”

Tribal stewardship and leadership in wildlife conservation provide a critical foundation for restoring and maintaining ecological integrity throughout the region. By integrating modern conservation science with Indigenous knowledge and stewardship, this initiative offers a powerful opportunity to build durable conservation solutions that benefit both wildlife and communities.

**Our Solution**

The Citizens Idaho Wolf Security Initiative will implement a comprehensive conservation strategy based on five integrated pillars:

**1. Science-Based Monitoring**

Reliable information is essential for effective conservation. The initiative will:

- Expand camera-trapping networks throughout the Big Wild.
- Support citizen-science wildlife observation programs.
- Monitor population trends in core wilderness and roadless areas.
- Build partnerships with universities and conservation organizations to strengthen long-term monitoring efforts.

**2. Conflict Prevention and Coexistence**

Successful wolf conservation depends on reducing conflicts before they occur. The initiative will:

- Support proactive conflict prevention measures in areas adjacent to wilderness or roadless.
- Demonstrate effective nonlethal tools for reducing livestock depredation.
- Establish rapid-response partnerships to address emerging conflict situations.

**3. Wildlife Corridor Conservation**

Connectivity is essential for maintaining healthy wolf populations and resilient ecosystems. The initiative will:

- Identify and map priority movement corridors.
- Focus conservation efforts on key linkage zones such as the Lochsa-Lolo Corridor and the Lolo-to-Lookout landscape.
- Assess mortality risks within critical dispersal routes.
- Promote conservation strategies that maintain permeability between Idaho and Montana populations.
- Support forest and roadless area protections that preserve connectivity for multiple species.

**4. Tribal and Collaborative Stewardship**

Conservation success depends on strong partnerships. The initiative will:

- Strengthen collaboration with the Nez Perce Tribe.
- Support joint conservation planning across treaty lands and traditional homelands.
- Develop cooperative stewardship initiatives with conservation organizations, local communities, land managers, and researchers.

- Promote knowledge sharing between scientific and Indigenous conservation approaches.

**5. Public Engagement and Education**

Public understanding is essential for long-term conservation success. The initiative will:

- Launch outreach campaigns highlighting the ecological importance of wolves.
- Develop citizen-science opportunities for wildlife monitoring.
- Create public reporting systems for wolf observations.
- Establish community engagement and education programs.
- Expand opportunities for Idahoans to participate directly in conservation efforts.

These actions will benefit not only wolves but also grizzly bears, wolverines, lynx, elk, mule deer, and numerous other wildlife species. The partnerships will build lasting capacity for large-landscape conservation throughout the Northern Rockies. By building awareness and engagement, the initiative will foster stronger public support for wildlife conservation across the region.

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**Theory of Change**

Ecologically functioning wolf populations can be sustained when three conditions are achieved:

1. Human-caused mortality is reduced.
2. Habitat connectivity is maintained and strengthened.
3. Public support for coexistence continues to grow.

Evidence from across the Northern Rockies demonstrates that science-based monitoring, proactive coexistence programs, and collaborative conservation can successfully support large carnivore recovery. By applying these proven approaches within the Big Wild, the initiative will strengthen wolf populations while enhancing ecological resilience throughout one of North America's most important conservation landscapes.

The initiative seeks not merely to prevent further decline, but to restore ecological function, strengthen wildlife abundance, and reconnect landscapes at scales necessary for long-term conservation success.

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**Goals (1-5 Years)**

**Secure Functional Wolf Populations**

Maintain socially intact and ecologically functioning wolf populations within the core of the Big Wild.

**Protect Connectivity**

Ensure that wolves can disperse safely through priority wildlife corridors connecting Idaho and Montana.

**Reduce Human-Caused Mortality**

Implement proactive conservation measures that lower mortality risks in key habitats and movement corridors. Advocate for modern science-based management.

**Expand Coexistence**

Increase adoption of effective nonlethal conflict-prevention strategies among producers and land managers.

**Strengthen Public Support**

Build public understanding of the ecological and cultural importance of wolves and other carnivores.

**Advance Tribal Stewardship**

Support collaborative conservation initiatives led in partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe.

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**Expected Outcomes**

Within five years, the initiative will achieve:

- A secure, socially intact, and ecologically functional wolf population within the Big Wild.
- Reduced human-caused mortality in priority habitats and movement corridors.
- Improved connectivity between Idaho and Montana wildlife populations.
- Expanded education and implementation of nonlethal coexistence measures.
- Stronger partnerships among Tribal, conservation, scientific, and community organizations.
- Increased public awareness and support for wolf conservation.
- Enhanced recognition of the Nez Perce Tribe's leadership in landscape-scale conservation and ecosystem restoration.

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**Partnerships**

Key partners will include:

- Friends of the Clearwater
- Nez Perce Tribe
- University of Idaho
- Swan Valley Coalition
- Conservation and corridor-focused organizations across Idaho and Montana

Together, these partners will create a coordinated, science-based approach to conserving one of North America's most important wildlife landscapes.

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**Call to Action**

The Big Wild is one of the last places in the continental United States where ecological processes still function at extraordinary scales. Protecting and strengthening wolf populations within this landscape will benefit entire ecosystems, support cultural and conservation values, and help secure a resilient future for wildlife across the Northern Rockies.

Now is the time to invest in a positive vision for the Big Wild: connected landscapes, thriving wildlife populations, strong Tribal partnerships, and communities working together to ensure that wolves continue to fulfill their essential role in one of North America's most important wild places.

We invite funders, partners, Tribal leaders, scientists, and citizens to join us in securing the future of wolves and the ecological integrity of the Big Wild for generations to come.

For more information or to get involved, contact:
**Friends of the Clearwater** – foc@friendsoftheclearwater.org

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**Implementation of Actions and Budget (Estimated)**

**Citizens Idaho Wolf Security Initiative Budget**

| Category | Activity | Budget ($) |
|---|---|---|
| **Outreach & Engagement** | Outreach campaign materials | 10,000 |
| | Partnership building, outreach, citizen engagement, travel | 20,000 |
| | Website support for watershed-level wolf location and mortality reporting | 5,000 |
| | "Adopt a Wolf" public engagement program | 5,000 |
| **Subtotal – Outreach & Engagement** | | **40,000** |
| **Partnerships & Tribal Collaboration** | Develop partnership framework with the Nez Perce Tribe | 40,000 |
| | Collaboration with Nez Perce Tribe on protection, monitoring, and management across treaty lands, and traditional homeland | 20,000 |
| **Subtotal – Partnerships & Tribal Collaboration** | | **60,000** |
| **Monitoring & Research** | Follow-up monitoring of reports (camera traps, hair snares, travel, personnel time) | 20,000 |
| | Financial incentives for verified wolf reports ($100 × 50 records) | 5,000 |
| | Proactive monitoring and camera-trapping collaborations (Great Burn, Selway-Bitterroot-Frank Church Foundation, University of Idaho) | 10,000 |
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| **Subtotal – Monitoring & Research** | | **35,000** |
| **Conflict Prevention & Community Programs** | | |
| | Develop on-call range riding program with partners | 20,000 |
| | Idaho conflict/coexistence staff position | 20,000 |
| **Subtotal – Conflict Prevention & Community Programs** | | **40,000** |
| **Conservation & Policy** | Roadless area protection and forest watch activities | 20,000 |
| | Assessment of Idaho wolf bounty program and potential actions/litigation as it pertains to harm for grizzly bears | 5,000 |
| | Amicus brief regarding federal killing of wolves and grizzlies in wilderness | 5,000 |
| **Subtotal – Conservation & Policy** | | **30,000** |

**Budget Summary**

| Program Area | Amount ($) |
|---|---|
| **Outreach & Engagement** | 40,000 |
| **Partnerships & Tribal Collaboration** | 60,000 |
| **Monitoring & Research** | 35,000 |
| **Conflict Prevention & Community Programs** | 40,000 |
| **Conservation & Policy** | 30,000 |
| **Total Budget** | **205,000** |

**References**

Wheeler in-

https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/northwest/idaho/article308399885.html