

Congressional War on Wolves: Trust the Science Act
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Image from ProjectCoyote.org

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Trust the Science Act Summary: H.R.764 — 118th Congress (2023-2024). Introduced by Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Co-3, Committee House Natural Resources Passed by recorded vote: 209 - 205 ([Roll no. 169](#)). (text: CR [H2729](#)). (Received in the Senate 05/01/2024)

This bill directs the Department of the Interior to remove protections for the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Specifically, the bill requires Interior to reissue the final rule titled *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Removing the Gray Wolf (Canis lupus) From the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife* and published on November 3, 2020.

The rule removed the gray wolf in the lower 48 United States, except for the Mexican wolf (*C. l. baileyi*) subspecies, from the endangered and threatened species list. However, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California vacated the rule on February 10, 2022. As a result, the gray wolf regained the protection status it had prior to the rule's promulgation. The bill also prohibits the reissuance of the rule from being subject to judicial review.

Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Chairman Cliff Bentz (R-Ore.) and U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber (R-Minn.) hosted an oversight field hearing May 3rd 2024 in Sandstone MN on the gray wolf population, the species' successful recovery and the need for its removal from the endangered species list. He stated:

"A wolf is not a pet dog. It is not a schnauzer or golden retriever. It is a natural-born killer that wreaks havoc upon wildlife, preys on livestock, and damages the ability of fish and wildlife agencies to do their jobs. On top of all this, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has admitted that for the gray wolf, 'there is no risk of quasi extinction in the next 100 years.' So, we must ask ourselves, how many wolves is enough? This hearing provided a platform for experts to testify on the implications of the gray wolf population surge, its ramifications, and what the federal government must do about it."

U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) stated:

"The gray wolf is fully recovered, and if anyone needs proof of this fact, look no further than Minnesota's Eighth Congressional District. The dramatic rise of the gray wolf in northern Minnesota has led to a diminished deer population, increased predation on livestock, and resulted in the tragic loss of countless family pets. I am glad to have my House Natural Resources colleagues here in Minnesota, where we heard firsthand from a number of my constituents who have been negatively impacted by the state's rapidly rising gray wolf population. Their message to us was clear: we must remove the gray wolf from the endangered species list and return management to the states. I am thankful for their testimonies, and glad for the chance to discuss our collective efforts to achieve responsible wolf management, including the recent House passage of the Trust the Science Act."

The only "scientist" invited to speak at the meeting in Sandstone was Nathan Roberts, College of the Ozarks, Point Lookout MO whose main body of published reports involves estimating fur-bearer numbers (fisher, otter, beaver, bobcat) to determine sustainable "harvesting" numbers for trappers. He asserted at this meeting; *"Gray wolves are recovered in the United States. The science is clear; this species is recovered, secure, and recovery goals have been met many times over. States have the ability, and an undeniable track record of species management and recovery, to effectively and sustainably manage this species for the benefit of the public they serve. This is why the federal government, and so many states, have appropriately supported delisting again and again. It is time to delist wolves."* The only supportive reference in his report was the dated one by L.G. Adams et al (2008), Population Dynamics and Harvest Characteristics of Wolves in the Central Brooks Range, Alaska. Wildlife Monographs, 170: 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.2193/2008-012>.

What this rabidly anti-wolf Congressman Cliff Bentz from the 2nd District of Oregon came to do in Minnesota, home to the largest gray wolf population in the Lower 48, is not acceptable to most state residents who do not, along with wolf biologists, see any need to "manage" the gray wolf population by hunting and trapping. People need to be "managed" not letting their dogs run free where they could be killed by wolves or be injured by a trap or snare set for wolves, and

livestock keepers use non-lethal methods of predator deterrence with compensation for any veterinary-confirmed wolf kills.

Those who see wolves as challenging trophies to shoot and kill (many being injured and running off to die slowly) should be regarded as potential psychopaths and have no voice as “stakeholder sportsmen.” Rep. Bentz’s moiety of truth that wolves are “born killers” is right. Wolves are predators, but unlike human predators they provide vital ecological services. The bigger truth is the livestock industry has invaded wolf habitat and has become a major factor in climate change and loss of biodiversity.

Killing predators may, counterintuitively, lead to [more livestock deaths](#). Killing wolves for livestock depredation may simply drive survivors to kill on other farms and ranches that then call for more wolf-killing. One [study](#) on wolf kills in Michigan found “a three times elevation of risk to livestock on neighboring properties after a farm received lethal control of wolves from Wildlife Services.”

According to this detailed evaluation, “Ethical wildlife management guided by the “best scientific and commercial data available” would suggest suspending the standard method of trapping wolves in favor of non-lethal methods (livestock guarding dogs or fladry) that have been proven effective in preventing livestock losses in Michigan and elsewhere.” (Santiago-Avila FJ, Cornman AM, Treves A. Killing wolves to prevent predation on livestock may protect one farm but harm neighbors. *PLoS One*. 2018 Jan 10;13(1):e0189729. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0189729. Erratum in: *PLoS One*. 2018 Dec 19;13(12):e0209716. PMID: 29320512; PMCID: PMC5761834.).

Coyotes notably adapt to being “exterminated” by having more offspring. Some predator species that experience mass killing events clearly [compensate](#) by having more offspring at younger ages. That could partly explain why, when wolf killings increased in [some Western states](#), livestock predation went up, too. And when you wipe out some animals, others may fill the void. Coyotes significantly [expanded their range](#) in the 1900s after America’s centuries-long wolf [extermination campaign](#).

Managing wildlife by their numbers is archaic science and ethically compromising when our own numbers and those of farmed animals are discounted in terms of environmental impact and biodiversity conservation.