

November 11, 2020

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# Drum Beats

Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians

## Gray wolf off endangered list

Enraged Americans protest ruling that puts Ma'iingan future in question



By Richard J. Pufall

For the Bad River Band

The Ma'iingan, or gray wolf, long respected and revered by the Ojibwe people, and on the Endangered Species List for 45 years, was delisted by Donald J. Trump's Administration on October 29, five days before the Presidential election.

This move, of course, has drawn the interest, dismay, and concern of the Bad River Band in general and, specifically, of Abi Fergus, Wildlife Specialist for the Mashkiiziibii Natural Resources Department. The delisting turned management of gray wolf populations over to state and Tribal governments and brought 1.8 million angry comments from enraged Americans.

"In addition to the potentially political timing of this delisting, the Great Lakes states are not ready to take on the responsibility of caring for Ma'iingan in the way that Bad River and other Great Lakes Tribes are," Fergus said, "Wisconsin's Wolf Plan is almost as old as I am. It hasn't been updated since its publication in 1999 and a two-decade lag on incorporating the latest science and ethical thinking is unacceptable.

"In my conversations with Tribal and treaty authority biologists who have been caring for our relationship to Ma'iingan since before I was born, they are reflecting on the ways that the Great

Photo by Brian Ross, Wisconsin DNR pilot and Shannon McNamara WDNR biologist

Gray wolves Gimiwan, (It Rains), left, breeding male of the Mashkiiziibii Pack and breeding female Nagweyaab (Rainbow), walk on a Bad River Reservation tributary.

This photo was taken from a Wisconsin DNR airplane.

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Bad River landowners who are whereabouts unknown, Pages 52-59

## Gray wolf

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Lakes states, in some ways, have not improved upon the tragic way delisting played out in the early 2010s, when tribal sovereignty was repeatedly ignored by state and federal governments.”

*(To learn more context, you can watch Fergus's presentation from the Great Lakes Wolf Symposium found on the wildlife page: [badriver-nsn.gov/wildlife/](http://badriver-nsn.gov/wildlife/)).*

In December of 2019, Senators Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Lee and Mitt Romney from Utah, and Steve Daines from Montana introduced legislations to remove the gray wolf from the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The delisting was proposed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Services so wolves could be managed by individual states.

Sen. Lee said science is on the government's side.

“Today there are an estimated 5,600 gray wolves in the United States and grey wolf population continues to exceed the appropriate management levels,” Lee said.

“The levels were established by

relevant state wildlife divisions and benchmarks from the Fish and Wildlife Service.”

The concern is, there are so many gray wolves roaming about that they have become a real threat to America's live-



Photo by the Bay City News Service

**Abi Fergus is the Wildlife Specialist for the Mashkiiziibii Natural Resources Department.**

stock. And the plight of the American farmer was not lost on Fergus, who understands their fears.

“First, I just want to be clear that I really value the excruciatingly hard and under-appreciated work that small farmers do to feed us,” Fergus said. “A primary focus of mine in the wildlife program is working with farmers that neighbor the reservation or the Ma'iingan Relationship Plan buffer zone.

“We troubleshoot keeping all sorts of native carnivores away from their livestock from the use of non-lethal deterrents like light makers and lines of fladry (flagging) to finding solutions through changing animal husbandry. Attitude studies are

available that tried exploring different categories like farmers, deer hunters, and bear hunters.

“Generally, bear hunters are the most anti-wolf demographic and the ones with money in Washington. For the most part I believe that farmers don't want to see their animal companions die, understand that carnivores are part of the landscape, and just want to be able to make a living. One farmer I work very closely with lives by the understanding that a new individual or pack will always replace the empty niche that is made once someone chooses to kill a native carnivore, and instead it is better to find ways to build an understanding of coexistence with these carnivores.”

The gray wolf population in the lower 48 states stands at approximately 6,000, but Fergus says it's not really about the numbers.

“Most of those Ma'iinganag (wolves) are in the arrowhead region of what we now call Minnesota,” she said. “That's also where the Great Lakes population revived itself from, after a point in which

Ma'iinganag had been extirpated (regionally driven extinct) in what we now call Wisconsin and Michigan.

“I don't appreciate the way the natural sciences are hung up on population numbers, because when it comes down to it a number doesn't mean anything. It's how the population interacts with the ecosystem that matters, and we're distracted by counts rather than exploring how the current populations of Ma'iingan are shaping their ecosystems. Maybe helping prevent the spread of CWD. Maybe helping to keep beavers out of certain areas.

“This kind of understanding takes time, and we haven't had the time, resources, and focus to learn before interest groups with money have once again influenced what should be scientific and ethical decision. All that being said, Ma'iinganag and humans were once the most widespread animals on the globe, and in many cases Ma'iingan paved the way for us to learn how to survive in new habitats and ecosystems we came across as we spread

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## Gray wolf

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across the globe. For me, that helps put into context the fact that in the lower 48 states, Ma'iingan has only been allowed to occupy the northern fringes of the northern states, for the most part.”

The delisting of the gray wolf, announced on October 29, outraged Americans, with approximately 1.8 million comments submitted by the public opposing the ruling. Additionally, 86 members of Congress (in both the House and Senate), 100 scientists, 230 businesses and 367 veterinary professionals submitted letters opposing the wolf delisting plan. Even the scientific peer reviews commissioned by the Fish and Wildlife Service itself found that the agency's proposal contained numerous errors and appeared to come to a predetermined conclusion, with inadequate scientific support. Despite this public and scientific outcry, the ruling removes all federal protections from gray wolves.

Randy Johnson, a large carnivore specialist for Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, told Wisconsin Public Radio last month that if wolf management fell back to the state, it would use all of the tools available to find a balance, “between a healthy and sustainable wolf population, but also addressing those social concerns and livestock concerns when and where needed.”

However, turning management of gray wolf populations over to state and Tribal governments was of least concern for Fergus.

“This is the facet of delisting that I don't have any concerns over, because the Great Lakes Tribes started 2020 with the Mashkiiziibii Ma'iingan Symposium,” Fergus said. “At this gathering we reflected on the delisting period in the early 2010s, discussed the pending or completed update of Tribal Ma'iingan plans, and began forming a network of Tribes to collaborate on caring for our relationship with Ma'iingan. The Bad River Tribe has had a Ma'iingan Plan since 2013 when previous Wildlife Specialist Lacey Hill-Kastern originally published it. With the help of the community and Lacey's mentorship, I updated the plan with recent science and improved incorporation of Anishinaabe knowledge in 2019. Ma'iinganag within the Bad River Reservation and extending out into a six-



Photo by Brian Ross, Wisconsin DNR pilot, and Shannon McNamara WDNR biologist

**Gray wolves Gimiwan, left, and Nagweyaab of the Mashkiiziibii Pack, make their way along a Bad River Reservation tributary. There are about 1,100 gray wolves in Wisconsin.**

mile buffer zone around the reservation (outlined in the Mashkiiziibii Ma'iingan Relationship Plan) are not to be hunted.

“The Tribes have been doing so much good for Ma'iingan in preparation for this day, and now the situation remains that we are waiting on proper Tribal consultation from the state and federal governments and involvement in the update of Great Lakes state plans.”

The gray wolf population in Wisconsin stands at about 1,100. If that seems low, it shouldn't.

“This is actually the highest the Ma'iingan population has been here post-colonization, but there could certainly be more,” Fergus said. “What's interesting is that a lot of biologists and others were arguing the wolf population in Wisconsin was leveling out the past few years, but this year the population was significantly up. I love how Ma'iingan proves us wrong or reminds us that we don't know everything.”

With so many Americans outraged by the delisting and 1.8 million comments in opposition, one has to wonder how this “unpopular” ruling was approved.

“This is a political decision,” Fergus said. “In addition to the record number of public comments against delisting, all five scientific reviewers of the proposal had concerns about delisting wolves. Attitude studies are repeatedly showing that the public is often in favor of living with wolves, but there has been a history of

bear hunting lobbies in particular throwing money around to get the wolf delisted and hunted.

“The federal government never even consulted with the Bad River Tribe in formal Tribal consultation, so in many ways this delisting can be shown to be reckless and invalid. The Endangered Species List Act is not very strong, and interest groups, legislatures, and Presidential administrations have historically been chipping away at it to weaken it.

“There are other paths forward though. Peter David talks about a Ma'iingan Protection Act, like the Golden and Bald Eagle Protection Act that offers these relatives protection even though they aren't on the Endangered Species Act. White Earth elder Zhaashiigid Nooding (Bob Shimek) is working on a tribal endangered species act. I think it's time to take new approaches and learn from a clear politicized back and forth that has put Ma'iingan on and off the Endangered Species List over and over again throughout my lifetime.”

The gray wolf had been protected for 45 years, but if hunting and trapping of the Ma'iingan is allowed it wouldn't take long before these wolves are endangered again.

“Yes, we have clear examples of what happened in Wisconsin specifically last time – hunting quotas were greatly over-shot,” Fergus said. “Reservation wolves were murdered. Also, delisting doesn't

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## Gray wolf

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usually happen across all of Turtle Island (North America), it usually happens regionally. The wolves in the Rockies already receive less protections and in Idaho it is estimated that the government is killing up to 50 percent of the Ma'iingan population – 500 wolves last I saw.

“We know what will happen, but I am holding to the hope that we have until the autumn of 2021 before a hunt could happen in Wisconsin and in that time I hope others will join me to try and make law, policy, and society better understanding and honoring Ma'iingan. I believe we can at least reduce the harm that was caused last time if we learn from the past.”

Fergus said some Tribal governments, such as White Earth in northwestern Minnesota, have already taken steps to protect the Ma'iingan. White Earth already has laws dedicating the Reservation as a sanctuary for the gray wolf, and other Tribes are in conversations about improving or adding protection laws.

She said Minnesota is setting an excellent example as they proactively began updating their plan before delisting and are including Tribes, respectfully. Michigan, Fergus said, has reported the intention to update its plan, but Wisconsin has been



silent on that matter.

“This is a question we should all be pressuring State government on, and I did get to participate in a good meeting with Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers, Tribal Council, and the co-organizers of the Ma'iingan Symposium so they should know where Bad River stands and what the Tribe expects of the State,” Fergus said.

The news of the delisting of the gray wolf from the Endangered Species List came just after Ma'iingan Awareness Week. But there could be no good time for this announcement.

To the Anishinaabe people, the Ma'iingan is not just an animal, a fury, four-legged predator that must hunt to survive. It is a sacred brother, to be honored and respected.

“I’m actually going to speak about one way that this Anishinaabe relationship and understanding resonates with me, because I am not native and

I am honored to answer these questions about Ma'iingan but I am not the right person to speak to this one,” Fergus said. “Looking at the world through the concepts and stories of evolutions is fascinating to me.

“Earlier I mentioned how wolves helped humans spread across the globe by teaching us how to live in new habitats – that of course is known in Anishinaabe teachings. I just read, *“The First Domestication,”* by Pierotti and Fogg and it was amazing, because it turned my Western concept of “domestication” on its head.

“Domestication isn’t about humans ‘taming’ other animals, it’s about entering into a relationship that influences both members. *The First Domestication* book pointed out that Ma'iingan is essentially an evolutionary brother to all of us and shaped us – namely in the way we have learned to live communally, like a pack. This is also known in Anishinaabe knowledge.

“A final example of my learning from this book is on the arbitrary binary between a “wolf” and a “dog.” Defining a species is not actually clear cut and is determined scientifically with a combination of DNA comparisons, whether individuals can reproduce, and ecologically if clearly separated species seem to exist.

“Anishinaabeg and other indigenous people of Turtle Island seemed to differentiate dog and wolf based on whether the individual was living with humans (dog) or not (wolf). My point is that even though bad Western science can often be used to try and separate us humans from our kin in the natural world, good science helps me understand and contextualize the rich history Anishinaabeg already hold with Ma'iingan.”

It should be understood that strong, legal actions as well as words of protest have been aimed at overturning the delisting of the gray wolf.

Said Fergus: “Various organizations that work on positive Ma'iingan education have been preparing for this delisting and a lawsuit is certainly under way.”

*Addie Haughey, Legislative Director, of Lands, Wildlife, and Oceans Earthjustice & Rod Boam of the Cache Valley Daily.com contributed to this story.*

## Conservationists slam delisting of gray wolf from Endangered Species List

**The following are statements from a coalition of organizations that work toward wildlife conservation:**

“This is no ‘Mission Accomplished’ moment for wolf recovery,” said **Kristen Boyles, Earthjustice attorney.** “Wolves are only starting to get a toehold in places like Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, and wolves need federal protection to explore habitat in the Southern Rockies and the Northeast. This delisting decision is what happens when bad science drives bad policy – and it’s illegal, so we will see them in court.”

“Until all wildlife voices are weighted equally and the state agencies inhumane and unscientific management plans are changed to reflect real Wisconsin values on wolf conservation and independent research, then the wolf hasn’t truly recovered. Endangered species conservation begins and ends with managing and educating people. Delisting would essentially throw the wolf back into the hands of the very same attitudes and practices that caused their extinction in Wisconsin,” said **Melissa Smith, director of Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance and Friends of the Wisconsin Wolf & Wildlife.**

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## Conservationists slam delisting of gray wolf from Endangered Species List

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“Wolves are too imperiled and ecologically important to be cruelly trapped or gunned down for sport,” said **Collette Adkins, Carnivore Conservation Director at the Center for Biological Diversity**. “The Trump administration is catering to trophy hunters, the livestock industry and other special interests that want to kill wolves. We’ll do everything we can to stop it.”

“The decision to remove critical protections for still-recovering gray wolves is dangerously short-sighted, especially in the face of an extinction crisis. We should be putting more effort into coexistence with wolves instead of stripping critical protections still needed for their full recovery. The science is clear that we need to be doing more to protect nature and wildlife, not less,” said **Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune**.

“We are disappointed in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s final determination to remove federal protections for the gray wolf in the lower 48 states,” states **Angela Grimes, CEO of Born Free USA**. “With current gray wolf habitats spanning states that are hostile toward the species, gray wolves still teeter on the verge of recovery. Delisting this American icon appeases a small percentage of the American public and will surely damage the viability of future populations.”

“Without the protections afforded by the Endangered Species Act, gray wolves would never have recovered in the places where they are now,” said **Leda Huta, Executive Director of the Endangered Species Coalition**. “By removing protections across the country, the Trump Administration is abandoning efforts to restore this iconic American species to millions of acres of wild habitat.”

“Protecting and restoring the iconic call of the wolf is our duty to not only the populations of wolves that continue to be persecuted to this day, but to the ecosystems that depend upon them. Removing protections for wolves under the Endangered Species Act ensures that these much-maligned creatures will continue to struggle for their rightful place in the natural world,” stated **Louie Psihoyos, Founder and Executive Director of Oceanic Preservation Society**. “As we confront the 6th Mass Extinction, we must work to defend every living component to maintain nature’s complex and delicate balance.”



“Wolves are just beginning a tentative recovery in states like Washington, Oregon, California, and Colorado, and the howl of the wolf is completely absent from their natural habitats in states like Nevada and Utah,” said **Erik Molvar, a wildlife biologist and Executive Director of Western Watersheds Project**. “Removing Endangered Species Act protections before wolf populations are secure, and before their recovery is complete, is ecologically irresponsible.”

“By turning over gray wolf management to the states, the Fish and Wildlife Service is relying on local management regimes that often undermine gray wolf recovery efforts,” said **Cathy Liss, president of the Animal Welfare Institute**. “Many of the states’ wolf management plans are vague and unenforceable, lack sources of funding, and prioritize recreational hunting interests over the maintenance of viable wolf populations. Gray wolves are apex predators who play a vital role in ecosystems, contribute to a multibillion-dollar outdoor tourism industry, and are a beloved symbol of our nation’s wildlands.”

“Where wolves are unprotected, they are mercilessly persecuted, as we’ve already had a glimpse of in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana,” said **Lindsay Larris, Wildlife Program Director at WildEarth Guardians**. “Now they are defenseless across their range, which is bad news for wolves, but good news for people who want to shoot and trap them. The Trump administration is once again destroying our shared natural resources for the interests of a few.”

“Stripping protections for gray wolves is premature and reckless,” said **Defenders of Wildlife President and CEO, Jamie Rappaport Clark**. “Gray wolves occupy only a fraction of their former range and need continued federal protection to fully recover. We will be taking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to court to defend this iconic species.”

“If we want to save wolves, we need a national plan, if not a continental one,” said **Environment America’s Conservation Program Senior Director Steve Blackledge**. “Wolves need plenty of space to roam, and it just doesn’t make sense to create arbitrary boundaries for them. Do we really want to lose the hearty howl of the gray wolf on our watch?”

— *Compiled by Addie Haughey, Legislative Director of Lands, Wildlife, and Oceans Earthjustice.*

