

Poll takes the pulse of sportsmen on western gray wolf issue

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Gray wolves in the western United States remain a highly contentious issue. Populations of the reintroduced animals have reportedly exceeded expectations, so much so that the predators were removed from Endangered Species Act protection (at least temporarily, until U.S. District Court Judge Donald Molloy's Aug. 5 ruling [which placed gray wolves back on protected status](#)).

States are looking to overturn this decision and are seeking the authority to manage packs within their boundaries -- including the possibility of allowing wolf-hunting seasons, as were held in Idaho and Montana last year.

Among those stakeholder groups attempting to be heard on the matter -- state and federal legislators, animal-rights activists, ranchers and sportsmen -- are America's hunters. But when surveyed on the subject as to how best to proceed, they seem to have some gray areas.

Asked if they believe western gray wolf populations have recovered and should be removed from the Endangered Species List, well over half of the respondents to the September [HunterSurvey.com](#) and [AnglerSurvey.com](#) polls said yes, with 57.1% responding in the affirmative. But about 36% stated that they "did not know" if populations are recovered, with only 6.7% saying they are not.

One thing respondents seem united on is their distrust of the motivations behind animal welfare groups' opposition to delisting the gray wolf or turning over management authority to the states. An overwhelming 65% believe these groups are acting out of an interest to limit hunting opportunities, with almost 40% saying the organizations are doing so as a means to boost membership and donations. Only 16.1% believe these groups are acting out of genuine concern for conserving and restoring wolf populations. Comments submitted by survey respondents supported these beliefs, with many suggesting animal rights groups will say or do anything they can to put a stop to hunting in any form.

And at a rate of more than two to one, sportsmen are concerned that growing wolf populations are having a harmful impact on elk, moose and deer populations within their range. More than 68% believe wolves are negatively affecting ungulates, while 33.7% think the influence of more wolves is actually beneficial.

When turning the subject to political decisions, approximately 62% of survey participants said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate if they supported giving states primary management authority over wolf populations. Thirty-four percent said they weren't sure if it would influence their vote or said the topic was too complicated to say how they would vote based on the issue. Only 3.7% responded that they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supported state management authority.

"Future management of gray wolf populations is an extremely sensitive subject, particularly in the West where it most immediately affects the people and animals that live there," said Rob Southwick, president of [Southwick Associates](#), which creates and manages the surveys. "The results of the survey suggest a need for more clear-cut information be made available to the public regarding the current status of the gray wolf in the region and how it is impacting other game species."

Launched in 2006, AnglerSurvey.com and HunterSurvey.com help the outdoor equipment industry, government fisheries and wildlife officials, and conservation organizations track consumer activities and expenditure trends. The results are scientifically analyzed to reflect all U.S. anglers and hunters.

Those who hunt, fish and target-shoot are invited to participate in either or both survey sites. Respondents are entered in a monthly drawing for one of five \$100 gift certificates to the sporting goods retailer of their choice.

-- Kelly Burgess