Editorial Opinion

Save the Gray Wolf

A fight is going on in the West. At its center is the gray wolf, an animal on the endangered species list. Animals on the list are at risk of disappearing from Earth. The government protects these animals.

Gray wolves disappeared from Yellowstone National Park in the 1930s. Then large numbers of elk moved into the area. The elk ate too many plants. Animals that depended on these plants could no longer live there. In 1995, Yellowstone reintroduced the wolf. The elk went back to where they naturally lived before. "The whole environment underwent a change back to its natural balance, because the wolves were back," said Cat Lazaroff, from Defenders of Wildlife. The gray wolf is now thriving.

Why keep gray wolves on the endangered list if they are thriving? Many people think the gray wolf still needs protection. But many ranchers want to hunt wolves. They think wolves kill their livestock. "The wolf is the wildlife terrorist," said one rancher.

The truth is, wolves are usually not harmful to livestock. They mostly eat wild elk and moose. Some do eat dead or dying livestock.

"People can better protect their herds from wolves, . . . and we are willing to help them learn," said Lazaroff. Ranchers could remove sick or dead animals from their herds. They can also put up fences and install alarms.

If the government removes the gray wolf from the list, Montana and Idaho will allow some wolf hunting. But Wyoming will not limit hunting. Defenders of Wildlife says the area's wolf population would go from 1600 to 450 wolves.

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Right now wolves are protected. The US District Court ruled that wolves must be viewed as a whole population. They shouldn't be treated differently from one state to another. If the law protects wolves in Wyoming, it should protect them in Montana and Idaho, too. Until Wyoming changes its laws, the gray wolf will remain on the endangered species list.