

Senator Ron Johnson Statement for the Record
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works
Hearing on “Oversight: Modernization of the Endangered Species Act.”
February 15, 2017

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper and members of the committee, thank you for holding this oversight hearing regarding the Endangered Species Act. As an avid outdoorsman, I place a high value on preserving the environment for future generations. Preservation is a goal of the Endangered Species Act that we can all agree on, but the federal government must carry out its conservation efforts in a sensible and balanced manner.

Since late 2014, former Congressman Reid Ribble, Congressman Sean Duffy and I have been consistently and actively engaged with Wisconsinites regarding a species that now roams over much of Wisconsin — the gray wolf. This species was listed as endangered in 1974, when populations were at a record low. Wildlife experts enacted a wolf recovery plan that has far exceeded its Wisconsin goal of 350 wolves. According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin had at least 866 wolves in the 2015-2016 winter.

Due to the gray wolf’s recovery, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials first attempted in 2006 to delist the gray wolf as an endangered species. Wisconsin, Wyoming and other states were ready and willing to institute detailed management plans. In 2011 and 2012, Fish and Wildlife delisted the gray wolf as endangered in the Great Lakes and Wyoming. Unfortunately, a lawsuit and subsequent judicial ruling in late 2014 reversed the federal experts on the delisting.

I am glad the committee invited Jim Holte from the Wisconsin Farm Bureau to provide insights on the Endangered Species Act’s unintended, negative consequences. I strongly agree with what I have heard directly from Mr. Holte and other stakeholders including farmers, ranchers, loggers and sportsmen — that all future gray wolf listing decisions should be made by experts in the field, not judges in courtrooms.

In order to correct the misguided judicial action, I first introduced legislation two years ago with Chairman Barrasso requiring the Department of the Interior to reissue the respective 2011 and 2012 delisting decisions for Great Lakes and Wyoming gray wolves. Unfortunately, Congress did not take action on our bill last session. I was pleased to reintroduce the Johnson-Barrasso legislation, S.164, this year with the welcome addition of bipartisan support.

I am hopeful this committee and Congress will pass S.164 soon and note our bill takes a sensible approach that allows states to manage gray wolf populations while not modifying the Endangered Species Act. The bill also does not prevent Fish and Wildlife Service experts from ever returning the wolf to the endangered list if it determines the population is in need of federal protection. This legislation provides us an example of how states and the federal government can work together towards reasonable, common-sense solutions for ecosystem preservation.