



Keeping Northwest California wild since 1977

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**Court: Gray Wolves Can Keep California Endangered Species Protection**

***Judge Finds No Merit in Pacific Legal Foundation, Rancher Challenge***

SAN DIEGO, CA— A state court judge today upheld protection for gray wolves under the California Endangered Species Act. [The ruling](#) rejected a challenge from the Pacific Legal Foundation on behalf of the California Cattlemen’s Association and California Farm Bureau Federation.

“We’re so glad the court got it right and kept protection in place for California’s recovering gray wolves,” said Amaroq Weiss, the Center for Biological Diversity’s West Coast wolf advocate. “The Pacific Legal Foundation’s case was the worst kind of grasping at straws. This is a great result for the vast majority of Californians who want wolves to recover and who understand their importance to healthy ecosystems.”

Ranching groups had challenged gray wolves’ endangered status based on the erroneous claim that the wolves in California are the wrong subspecies. They also wrongly argued that the listing was improperly based on a single wolf’s presence, and that wolves can’t be endangered in the state as there are plenty elsewhere in the world.

“Wolves are coming back to California, and today’s decision gives them a red carpet to return home,” said Tom Wheeler, executive director of the Environmental Protection Information Center.

In 2011 a wolf known as OR-7 crossed the border into California from northeastern Oregon, becoming the first confirmed wild wolf in the state in 87 years. The Foundation had argued, however, that OR-7 was from a subspecies that never existed in California.

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The court rightly concluded that the California Fish and Game Commission has the authority to list at the species level and that OR-7 and subsequent wolves that have come into the state share a genetic history with wolves that once were widely distributed across California.

“State protections for wolves are critical given the animosity toward the species at the federal level,” said Nick Cady, legal director of Cascadia Wildlands. “It is a shame that this species, and many others, have been subjected to these political games.”

The court found that the state’s endangered species law protects species at risk of extinction in California and the commission need not consider the status of gray wolves globally. It found that threats to wolves necessitate their protection and the commission has the discretion to protect native species that were historically present based on visitation by even one animal, given the wildlife agency’s projections that more will likely arrive.

“There can be no question that gray wolves in California are endangered and need protection,” said Heather Lewis, an attorney at Earthjustice. “The gray wolf’s return to California is a success story we should celebrate, and we look forward to wolves continuing to recover in the Golden State.”

California has seen the establishment of two packs since OR-7 made his star appearance before returning to Oregon to settle down with a mate. The Shasta pack was discovered in 2015 but by mid-2016 had disappeared. The Lassen pack was confirmed in 2017 and produced pups for the second year in a row in 2018.

“Wolves are not yet close to recovered in California. At a time when the Trump administration is hostile to endangered species conservation, it is critically important that the state of California help recover wildlife like the iconic gray wolf,” said Joseph Vaile, executive director of Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center.

The Center for Biological Diversity, Environmental Protection Information Center, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center and Cascadia Wildlands Center, represented by Earthjustice, intervened on behalf of the state.

*The Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) advocates for the protection and restoration of northwest California’s forests, using an integrated, science-based approach, combining public education, citizen advocacy and strategic litigation. [www.wildcalifornia.org](http://www.wildcalifornia.org)*

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places. [www.biologicaldiversity.org](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org)*

*KS Wild protects and restores wild nature in Northern California and southern Oregon.*

*Cascadia Wildlands defends and restores Cascadia’s wild ecosystems in the forests, in the courts and in the streets. We envision vast old-growth forests, rivers full of salmon, wolves*

*howling in the backcountry, and vibrant communities sustained by the unique landscapes of the Cascadia bioregion. [Join our movement today.](#)*

*Earthjustice enforces laws to protect what we know to be irreplaceable wildlife and wild places, for this and future generations.*