Obama looks to seize momentum after big week

WASHINGTON (AP) — Doubted and deeply in need of a comeback, President Barack Obama had a political dream deep in need of a comeback, President

But on a rocky knoll beside the highway that gives park visitors a good vantage point on the landscape, skunk scorpions and telephoto lenses are trained not on the lounging herds but on a steep draw on the far side of the Lamar Valley. There, a pack of gray wolves has been visible, on and off, since about 9 a.m. Even as the wolves, like their prey, lay for the afternoon, the scorpions and eager visitors stop focused on the far hillocks in hopes of catching a glimpse of the animal that had recently been the stuff of bedtime stories.

Fifteen years ago this month what has been called the most controversial feat of conservation in United States history took place in this valley. On March 21, 1995, the gates of three acclimatization pens holding 15 Alberta-born wolves were opened, reintroducing the gray wolf to a prized ecosystem that had not seen the keystone predator for 70 years. For at least half a century prior, scientists had hypothesized on what was lost when the wolves disappeared. Did it allow for too many elk? If so, at what cost? The loss of a native grazier? Or was it more profound? Was it the loss of “wildness,” wherein, Henry David Thoreau once wrote, “is the preservation of the wildness, wherein, Henry David Thoreau once wrote,” the change is good or bad is based on your view, “The biggest return to the gray wolf’s court today will be learning how to live with wolves.

This month, the most visible of the white wolves that once roamed Yellowstone will be 15 years old. On March 21, the 10th anniversary of the Great Wolf Reintroduction, a four-part series will delve into the return to the wild, with a focus on the gray wolf’s court today.

Wolves matter. The biggest return to the gray wolf’s court today will be learning how to live with wolves.

Fifteen years after reintroduction, with more than 300 wolves now in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the region still struggles with the question: What do wolves mean for this nice of America famous for both the wilderness tarnished by Madrono cowboys and the wilderness yet untouched by man? They have altered how man hunts elk, how ranchers run stock and how millions enjoy Yellowstone. Among other things, their presence has allowed aspen to grow taller and give beavers more habitat. And scientists are still learning the wolf’s full role in this ecosystem.

President Barack Obama had a political dream deep in need of a comeback, President

STORY BY DANIEL PERSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN SPERRY OF THE CHRONICLE

Fifteen years after the return of wolves to Yellowstone National Park, questions remain: What have we gained, what have we lost, and perhaps most importantly, what have we learned?

Inside Yellowstone National Park, questions remain: What have we gained, what have we lost, and perhaps most importantly, what have we learned?

Inside Yellowstone National Park, questions remain: What have we gained, what have we lost, and perhaps most importantly, what have we learned?

Inside Yellowstone National Park, questions remain: What have we gained, what have we lost, and perhaps most importantly, what have we learned?
Elk cross a ridge near Mammoth in Yellowstone National Park. Researchers have documented many behavioral changes in the park’s elk herds since the return of their natural predator.

FROM ELK TO WOLVES

In 1946, Stansly Park, a conservationist, stated that ‘‘the restocking of the elk has been a failure’’ and that ‘‘the elk problem has become a challenge to the whole national parks and wilderness areas, for instance the Yellowstone area and the Montana range.’’

In 1963, Lenoir’s son, A. Stanford Park, published a report on the investigation into the removal of elk. In the report, the previous elk population was estimated to be 60,000.

In 1984, University of Wisconsin ecologist Aldo Leopold wrote that ‘‘every reasonable ecologist would agree’’ that the elk had been ‘‘a gift to the national parks’’.

In 1980, the Idaho nongame species in nonnative.

The wolves were released in Yellowstone in 1995 when wolves were reintroduced, likes to mark the Crystal pen’s fence to give the wolves another exit. If the wolves did not leave by March 23, so biologists cut a hole in the fence. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays.

Scientists have witnessed a recovery of willows and aspen stands in riparian areas following the reintroduction of wolves.

But they do not dispute that the wolves have reduced the number of elk. Never seen it more obvious than this past winter, when FWP drew up elk hunting regulations for coming years.

A second shipment of six wolves arrived from central British Columbia and reintroduced to Yellowstone. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces that the gray wolf population has achieved biological recovery goals.

The federal Environmental Impact Statement on the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and central Idaho is complete. Wolf hunting is defined as 30 feet in Montana. The wolves were released from the aluminum crates. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays.

DOING THE UNSPEAKABLE

Early work into 1990, in Yellowstone, Dr. Putnam observed that the wolves were destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The wolves were released in Yellowstone in 1995 when wolves were reintroduced, likes to mark the Crystal pen’s fence to give the wolves another exit. If the wolves did not leave by March 23, so biologists cut a hole in the fence. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays.

Scientists have witnessed a recovery of willows and aspen stands in riparian areas following the reintroduction of wolves.

But they do not dispute that the wolves have reduced the number of elk. Never seen it more obvious than this past winter, when FWP drew up elk hunting regulations for coming years.

A second shipment of six wolves arrived from central British Columbia and reintroduced to Yellowstone. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces that the gray wolf population has achieved biological recovery goals.

The federal Environmental Impact Statement on the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and central Idaho is complete. Wolf hunting is defined as 30 feet in Montana. The wolves were released from the aluminum crates. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays.

Scientists have witnessed a recovery of willows and aspen stands in riparian areas following the reintroduction of wolves.

But they do not dispute that the wolves have reduced the number of elk. Never seen it more obvious than this past winter, when FWP drew up elk hunting regulations for coming years.

A second shipment of six wolves arrived from central British Columbia and reintroduced to Yellowstone. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces that the gray wolf population has achieved biological recovery goals.

The federal Environmental Impact Statement on the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and central Idaho is complete. Wolf hunting is defined as 30 feet in Montana. The wolves were released from the aluminum crates. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays.

Scientists have witnessed a recovery of willows and aspen stands in riparian areas following the reintroduction of wolves.

But they do not dispute that the wolves have reduced the number of elk. Never seen it more obvious than this past winter, when FWP drew up elk hunting regulations for coming years.

A second shipment of six wolves arrived from central British Columbia and reintroduced to Yellowstone. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces that the gray wolf population has achieved biological recovery goals.

The federal Environmental Impact Statement on the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and central Idaho is complete. Wolf hunting is defined as 30 feet in Montana. The wolves were released from the aluminum crates. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The wolves were first seen in Yellowstone in 1994. In 1995, biologists released the wolves into Yellowstone. The wolves were fed Tuesdays and Fridays. The wolves were held in three acclimation pens built along Crystal, Rose and Soda Butte creeks. The pens were designed to attenuate the wolf program coordinator for FWP. ‘‘We are no longer able to produce that, ‘‘ said Carolyn Sime, the Yellowstone herd.

The historical expectation people had — the system that has been built up in Montana over the last 100 years by sportsman dollars. ‘‘It’s definitely had a hell of an impact on the park’s evolution. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem. ‘‘I’m absolutely convinced that wolves are destroying the Yellowstone ecosystem.
Through the end of a scope

Smith can be deadly serious about his work, but tries to foster friendship and camaraderie with the volunteer ecologists who put in 12-hour days.

“the wolves obviously allied elk, but that then averts numerous plants and scavengers, which also affect other aspects of the ecosystem, and so on...\

A puzzle is being witnessed already, 11 years into the restoration.

The rejuvenation of willows and aspens is potentially one of the effects. But, in a testament to the clarity of ecology, that 150 years may have more to do with climate change than with the wolves’ effect on the ecosystem. But Smith doesn’t think so.

A day in the life of Yellowstone wolf biologist Doug Smith

Top: Yellowstone Wolf Project volunteer Nate Unger –- an exercise to observe wolves in Lamar Valley. Biologists are participating in a 30-day study with other volunteers to intensively observe wolves in Yellowstone National Park. Above left: An airplane is used to help locate mates in the Canyon pack. Above right: Yellowstone wolf biologist Doug Smith, center, stands with volunteers watching the Blacktail Plateau pack converge on a carcass.
AT&T to sell cell phone signal-boosting boxes.

NEW YORK (AP) — AT&T Inc. says it will begin selling signal-boosting boxes in June to help customers whose homes are too far from a cell tower to get AT&T service.

The boxes, which accept Wi-Fi signals, are designed to boost AT&T cell phone service in areas where AT&T does not have traditional cell towers.

AT&T will sell the devices for $199.99, with a $100 rebate available to customers who agree to continue to use the equipment for 12 months.

The company is also offering a $50 mail-in rebate to customers who upgrade their phones to the nation's most advanced 4G LTE network, which can provide download speeds up to 10 times faster than 3G, the company said.

The devices will be available in time for the launch of the much-anticipated Apple iPhone 5, which is expected to be sold only by Verizon Wireless.

The boxes work with AT&T's 4G LTE network, which was launched in the first half of this year in 14 markets.

AT&T said it plans to cover an additional 25 markets by the end of 2012.

The company said it expects to sell 3.5 million devices in 2012.
**BOZEMAN DAILY**

**CHRONICLE**

**A CHRONICLE SPECIAL REPORT**

**TWOS ON THE RANGE**

**Ranchers led the extermination of the gray wolf in the West**

Fifteen years after reintroduction, they’re still learning how to live with their new neighbors

**STORY BY DANIEL PERSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN SPERRY OF THE CHRONICLE**

---

**D**illon — When talking about wolves on his ranch in the shabby foothills here, John Helle points out a stand of pines on a ridge across a ravine.

A few years ago, a three-wolf pack attacked and killed a sheepdog on his ranch. Government predator control agents killed two of the wolves, but a black female escaped. Not long after, Helle started finding dead sheep on his ranch with their throats cut out, a tall tale sign of wolf predation. As far as Helle could tell, the black wolf had taken over even on that woody ridge.

After two wolf packs were caught on the ranch in traps meant for coyotes, government agents issued Helle Montana’s first shoot-on-sight permit. He used it on a male he spotted from his pickup stocking his flock. The black female would eventually escape. Not long after, more sheep in his flock by the end of the ordeal.

Helle, a 46-year-old Montana State University graduate whose family has raised sheep in the area since his great-grandparents immigrated to southwest Montana from Austria, said people off the ranch don’t understand how vulnerable livestock is on the open range to wolves. “I don’t think people realize the vastness of the area,” Helle said as he drove his Ford F-350 across a rutted and rocky dirt road, “or the predator’s ability to stay away from us.”

With the settlement of the West, ranchers were largely responsible for the eradication of wolves, a fleet and efficient predator that can devastate domestic livestock. And, 15 years ago this month, when wolves were released into Yellowstone National Park, ranchers were the most vociferous opponents to the plan. The U.S. Farm Bureau even got a judge to order an injunction on reintroduction as the wolves were mid-flight from Alberta in January 1995. Until the order was lifted that night, the wolves had to stay in their aluminum kennels set down in the Yellowstone’s Lamar Valley.

But by March of that year, all 15 of the wolves had left theacinement pen and were in the wild.

Within a year, Helle said, there is now a 2,500-wolf population around Dillon, 72 miles from the western border of Yellowstone. When they came, it was one more sphere put on family ranches already dealing with the pressure of higher profit margins and hearing the call of local speculators that they’re a land developer from Alabama bought the ranch in 2006.

“There were more sheep in this country than the whole state of Montana a few years ago,” Helle said. “But ranchers finally say, ‘Heck with it. I’m not dealing with wolves and the forest Service and the public. I’m selling to a developer.’”

“He kind of see the loss of the West, in the loss of the family ranch.”

(Mary Waves, Page A12)

---

**OBAMA speaks into Afghanistan to voice U.S. resolve**

Obama defended his decision to escalate the fight, telling troops whose numbers he is tripling that their victory is imperative to America’s safety.

His bid to shore up faith in the struggle was aimed both at the troops who cheered President Obama’s visit was conducted entirely under a blanket of security.

On Monday, Afghan President Hamid Karzai expressed his appreciation for the visit to his palace, which he said would send a strong message to the international community. Karzai said he was confident that the visit would help restore confidence in the Afghan government and its ability to provide security for its citizens.

Karzai also thanked the American people for their support and said he looked forward to working with Obama to strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

The visit marked the first time a sitting U.S. president had traveled to Afghanistan since the U.S.-led coalition began the war in 2001.

President Obama said he was committed to the mission in Afghanistan and was looking forward to working closely with Karzai to bring about a peaceful and democratic future for the country.

Obama also thanked the troops for their service and sacrifice, saying they were America’s heroes.

---

**OBAMA’s BIKING**

Obama took a break from his busy schedule to enjoy a bike ride in the White House complex.

Obama rode a mountain bike through the Rose Garden and along the South Lawn before heading to the nearby Potomac River to cool off in the water. He was accompanied by several of his closest friends and family members.

---

**OBAMA’s SPORTS**

Obama’s visit to Afghanistan was his third trip to the country since taking office in 2009. During his previous visits, he has emphasized the need for a transition to a more democratic and stable government in Afghanistan. He has also called for a surge in troops to help turn the tide against the Taliban and its allies.

Obama’s visit to Afghanistan comes amid growing concern about the U.S. commitment to the war. Many in Congress and the public have called for the president to reevaluate the mission and consider a withdrawal of U.S. forces.

---

**OBAMA Speaks On Afghanistan**

President Obama speaks to troops of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan on Sunday.

---

**OBAMA’s HIGH 64 LOW 40**

One dedicated woman earns Woman of the Year honors from Balance

---

**OBAMA’s ENDING DRINKS**

Obama ended his trip with a toast to the troops and their families.

---

**OBAMA’s RETURNTIP**

Obama returns to the U.S. after a long trip abroad.

---

**OBAMA’s PHOTOGRAPHY**

Obama speaks to the troops at Bagram Air Base.

---

**OBAMA’s ZONE**

Obama returns to the U.S. after a long trip abroad.

---

**OBAMA’s VIDEO**

Visit www.dailychronicle.com for video commentary from John Helle.
A ski area resort conditions as of 4 p.m. yesterday

**Ski Report**

**Area ski resort conditions as of 4 p.m. yesterday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Hrs/W M/W/S</th>
<th>Hrs/W M/W/S</th>
<th>Hrs/W M/W/S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspen</td>
<td>100/90</td>
<td>100/90</td>
<td>100/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breckenridge</td>
<td>90/80</td>
<td>90/80</td>
<td>90/80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vail</td>
<td>80/70</td>
<td>80/70</td>
<td>80/70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steamboat Springs</td>
<td>70/60</td>
<td>70/60</td>
<td>70/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone</td>
<td>60/50</td>
<td>60/50</td>
<td>60/50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Park</td>
<td>50/40</td>
<td>50/40</td>
<td>50/40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**National Weather**

**Area Summary**

High pressure to the south will provide a southwesterly flow through this part of the state. In the southern part, plenty of clouds tonight will slow the chance for a shower tomorrow. While the threat for showers diminishes, that front will bring cooler temperatures.

**Weather Trivia**

1. How old is the earth?
2. What is the capital of Australia?
3. Who is the president of the United States?
4. What is the capital of France?
5. Who is the captain of the Paris Saint-Germain?

**Skiing Conditions**

Get your long-term powder and big landscape, and it's worked! Lealad. Ski resorts common. Wolf depredations is to get rid of the wolf, usually by killing. We're counting for 1.1 percent of both animals.

**The Philosophy of Ranching**

Driving across his ranch, Helle says he clubs on the Internet about wolves and wolf control. And, he adds, he's had trouble getting his family and people outside the area to talk about the animals.

For thousands of years, people, animals have been raising sheep to turn and hang around the wolves. As a result, Helle's family and people in the area to talk about the animals.

As sheep are killed, a wolf depredation is to get rid of the wolf, and if it's not killed by a government agent, the wolf is killed. Since 2005, Helle says, he's had trouble getting his family and people outside the area to talk about the animals.

And while many ranchers have complained, the program, others are dubious of it. In February interview, Elaine Axfeldt, Big Timber, said her family's decision to stop running sheep in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness was helped along because they were only compensated for a small portion of the 60 sheep killed by the wolf.

Helle refused compensation for the freedom. He thought they were not yet his sheep. "They were using it to justify the (wolf) program," he says. "They're not even out to make wolf food."

But a few years later, when a guard dog needed surgery after wolf attack, Helle accepted the help. "I guess we're going to have to figure out some way to deal with the costs," he says.

The Philosophy of Ranching

Driving across his ranch, Helle says he clubs on the Internet about wolves and wolf control. And, he adds, he's had trouble getting his family and people outside the area to talk about the animals.
There are wolves, and then there are wolves. One is the gray wolf, reintroduced to the Greater Yellowstone area in 1995 after a 70-year absence.

The other is a clever notion wrapped up on a national drama of public, moral, and legal perception. The reintroduction itself has been successful in that there are about 1,700 wolves in the Northern Rockies — a population the federal government deemed healthy enough to remove the wolves from the endangered species list in Montana and Idaho.

Yet groups on both sides of the debate continue to appeal to the public’s idea of the wolf as either a fierce, unwelcome predator or an elegant creature in its own right. “People are simply misunderstanding,” said Ed Bangs, wolf recovery coordinator at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “But if you do, they can be a pain in the butt, and it’s a small minority of local people who fully experience that.”

A HARD STORY TO TELL

Ken Hamilton of the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation said the story of the wolves has been misunderstood from the beginning, due largely to a widespread misunderstanding of how local people are affected by wolves.

“One point that the clashing interests groups have agreed on is that there’s truth on both sides. “If you don’t like wolves, here are wolves; great,” said Ed Bangs, wolf recovery coordinator at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “But if you do, they can be a pain in the butt, and it’s a small minority of local people who fully experience that.”

Last May, the Obama administration removed the gray wolf from the endangered species list in Idaho and Montana, marking the most significant development since wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho 14 years prior.

The move — which came at the end of two failed attempts to delist the wolf by the Bush administration — put the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in charge of the state’s 300-plus wolf population. It also reverberated in the first-ever fair-chase hunt that has almost halved in time. It changed how ranchers deal with livestock depredation and how wolf habitat could be managed. And, as expected, prompted a federal lawsuit.

Today, that case is before U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy in Missoula, and it represents a showdown for wolves in Montana.

The plaintiffs, a coalition of environmental groups, say the federal government made a mistake when handing management over to Montana and Idaho, allowing the states to set their wolf populations to as few as 100 and cap a population collapse.

State and federal officials insist that the state’s management plans will allow for a healthy population of wolves while allowing state biologists more flexibility when managing the species.

“It’s not just about wolves,” said Carolyn Sime, FPW’s wolf program coordinator, said about the lawsuit. “It’s about the principles of state fish and wildlife management.”

A TOOKEN POPULATION?

When the federal government reintroduced wolves to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in 1995 — augmenting the wolf population already forming in northwest Montana — it spilled what wolf recovery would look like to 15 breeding pairs in each of the three areas for three consecutive years.

Schweitzer ‘blackmailing’ communities into supporting coal leases

Gov. Brian Schweitzer told a handful of community leaders Monday that he wants a letter of support for leasing the Otter Creek coal tracts in southeastern Montana before he releases their share of $3.8 million in state grant money.

Brian Schweitzer told a handful of community leaders Monday that he wants a letter of support for leasing the Otter Creek coal tracts in southeastern Montana before he releases their share of $3.8 million in state grant money.

“Money is supposed to be used for schools and he’s trying to use it as a dash fund to spread around the state to curry favor for his administration and essen- tially buy Blackfeet commu- nities support for coal,” Jensen said to the Missoulian.

The governor said he thinks the allegation misses the point.

“If any community specifi- cally doesn’t want funds that are traced to coal money, they need to be honest and tell them that there are funds being traced to coal money,” Schweitzer said.

Jensen said the release of some of the grant money is im- portant because it represents certain that the state will receive an $85.8 million lease payment from Arch Coal Inc. on April 16.

“I’m here today to say that I haven’t decided which projects I want to pursue,” he said. “I can’t cut it up by $2 million, but I believe our state has improved a great deal, really because of that $45 million.”

In Missoula, Schweitzer asked the mayor, Missoula County commissioners, and state legislators for letters of support of a $300,000 road project and for the use of coal money to pay for it.

“The potential revenue from the sale of Otter Creek coal might mean this particular project wouldn’t be funded,” Schweitzer said in a letter he signed at the end of his visit. “Please return a letter confirming that you support the use of coal money for the completion of your project/proposal.”

Get your blue and white Yellowstone National Park guidebook!
New Wolf Watch: New York Public Radio's 24/7 stream of reporting, analysis and insights about the saga of the wolf in New York is now available on the network’s podcast channel. Visit npr.org/386218199 for the latest.

The population is in great shape," said Mike Phillips, who helped with the Yellowstone restoration as a federal biologist and now works for Ted Turner. However, Phillips said, there is more at play than music numbers. "There is also the question of legal..." Specifically, Judge Molley in a preliminary ruling questioned whether it was legal for the Fish and Wildlife Service to carve Wyoming out of the Yellowstone ecosystem. The ruling means that the Defenders of Wildlife would have to answer the lawsuit before the court.

According to Bangs, "wolf stuff generally has nothing to do with wolves at all, but has everything to do with the word..."

"Readily, wolves are people. They are fascinating," said Sime of FWP.

"We’ve been told over and over again that one has to hate my guts," said Smith, who lives in Gardiner. "The more social tolerance the..."