

Wolf saga is tale of broken promises

By *GOV. BUTCH OTTER*

It was 30 years ago that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan was signed. The goal was to have 30 breeding pairs for three successive years in three designated areas of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming before delisting wolves and turning management over to the states.

Three decades later, instead of 30 breeding pairs of wolves in the three-state region, we now have hundreds upon hundreds of wolves in Idaho alone. **The goal, intended to trigger the process of taking wolves off the endangered species list, was met in 2003. What happened?**

Government happened. Environmental absolutists and their willing allies in the federal courts happened. The wolves are still here and still protected by federal law. That's more than you can say for our elk, deer and livestock or the Idaho families supported by hunting-related businesses or ranching. They remain just voices in the wilderness to policy-makers in Washington, D.C.

But not to me. During the past few years, my administration:

(Enacted a law in 2008 enabling owners of livestock and domestic animals to kill any wolf found molesting or attacking their animals—similar to laws on black bears and mountain lions.

(Twice participated in the federal delisting process, in 2008 and 2009.

(Aggressively defended delisting and Idaho's approved wolf management plan against two court cases, which now have advanced to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

(Worked with Idaho ranchers and sportsmen and legislators in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming toward developing a coordinated approach to addressing wolves in the region.

(Met with Interior Secretary Salazar and top Fish and Wildlife Service officials this summer and fall in an attempt to get the authority and flexibility Idaho needs to effectively manage wolves.

(Ended Idaho's federal "designated agent" status to refocus our efforts on protecting our ungulates and ensure that Idaho sportsmen's dollars will not be spent on managing wolves until the species is delisted.

Of course, we must respect and obey federal laws, but the First Amendment also empowers all of us to "petition the Government for a redress of grievances." **Wolves are a grievance.** Judge Molloy's rulings that ignore realities on the ground and the responsible steps Idaho has taken to sustainably manage wolves are a grievance. **Repeated legal claims by wolf advocates with nothing more at stake than their fundraising efforts are a grievance.**

We are up to our necks in grievances—and wolves. But so far, there has been no redress.

I understand that Secretary Salazar and the Fish and Wildlife Service also have been taken for a ride by the selective memory and tunnel vision of wolf advocates. I truly believe that the agency and even the secretary would delist wolves tomorrow if they could. But the federal government's broader inability to back up its commitments has gone from frustrating to costly and—in my view—**beyond the scope or intent even of the badly flawed Endangered Species Act.**

Getting them to live up to those promises will remain my commitment to the people of Idaho—for as long as it takes.

Idaho Gov. Butch Otter, a Republican, was elected Tuesday to a second term.