



September 8, 2021

Via Electronic and Certified Mail

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RE: Sixty-day Notice of Intent to Sue for Violations of the Endangered Species Act

Dear Secretary Haaland, Director Williams, and Director Siekaniec:

The Center for Biological Diversity, Alaska Rainforest Defenders, and Defenders of Wildlife (collectively, “Petitioners”) provide this 60-day notice of intent to sue the U.S. Department of Interior (“Interior”) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (“Service”) for violating the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1531-1544 (“ESA”), resulting from the Service’s failure to issue a required 12-month finding on the petition to list the Alexander Archipelago wolf (*Canis lupus ligoni*) dated July 15, 2020. This finding is past the deadline established by the ESA. Petitioners provide this letter according to the 60-day notice requirement of the ESA’s citizen suit provision. *Id.* §1540(g)(2)(C).

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places, including the Alexander Archipelago wolf.

Alaska Rainforest Defenders, founded in 2011, is a regional conservation non-profit corporation in Southeast Alaska dedicated to defending and promoting the biological integrity of Southeast

Alaska's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.

Defenders of Wildlife, founded in 1947, is a major national conservation and science-based advocacy nonprofit organization committed to conserving and restoring native species and the habitat upon which they depend. It has over 1.8 million members and supporters, and is headquartered in Washington, D.C. with field offices in 12 states, including Alaska.

BACKGROUND

The Alexander Archipelago wolf ("Archipelago wolf") is a rare subspecies of the gray wolf that is endemic to the coastal temperate rainforests of Southeast Alaska and coastal British Columbia. The Archipelago wolf has a close association with old-growth forests, primarily using low-elevation old-growth forest habitat for denning, raising pups, hunting, movement, and other essential behaviors. Habitat use is associated with availability and abundance of their primary prey, the Sitka black-tailed deer, which also rely on old-growth forest habitat.

THREATS TO THE ARCHIPELAGO WOLF

Archipelago wolves face multiple high-magnitude threats. Although range-wide population estimates are uncertain, the population was estimated at 908 wolves throughout Southeast Alaska in the 1990s. The only regularly monitored population is found on Prince of Wales Island (POW). Over the past 15 years, the POW wolf population has suffered a decline of ~60% due to escalating threats from habitat destruction and mortality from trapping and hunting. An unprecedented 165 wolves were killed during the 2019-2020 trapping season. This occurred after state and federal wildlife managers ignored the recommendations of their wolf management program and eliminated limits on the number of wolves that could be trapped or hunted.

Hunting and trapping occur at unsustainable levels on POW, with illegal killing accounting for as much as half of human-caused mortality. Further threats include intensive clear-cut logging of old-growth forests on the Tongass National Forest and neighboring state and private lands, which degrades and fragments wolf habitat and reduces long-term carrying capacity for deer, their primary prey, while injuring salmon runs that provide an important seasonal food source. Logging-associated road development also increases wolf mortality by facilitating access for trappers and hunters. The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, inbreeding, and impacts from climate change continue to harm the Archipelago wolf population.

Adding to these harms, in 2020 the U.S. Forest Service eliminated protections from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule ("Roadless Rule") on the Tongass National Forest, opening 168,000 acres of irreplaceable old-growth forest to clear-cut logging.

In July 2021, the Service found that the Petitioners' petition presented substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing the Alexander Archipelago wolf may be warranted due to potential threats associated with logging and road development, illegal and legal trapping and hunting, the effects of climate change, and loss of genetic diversity and inbreeding depression. 86 Fed. Reg. 40,186, 40,188 (July 27, 2021). Although the Biden

Administration recently announced that it intends to restore the Roadless Rule on the Tongass National Forest, and that the Forest Service’s Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy will end large-scale old growth timber sales on the Tongass National Forest, the announcements did not include deadlines for the implementation of the Forest Service initiatives. The wolf’s low numbers, mismanagement of trapping, and damage from past and future national forest logging, as well as private and state mature and old growth forest logging, climate change, and inbreeding depression, continue to threaten the Archipelago wolves.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT VIOLATIONS

In response to a petition to list a species under the Endangered Species Act, Section 4 of the Act requires the Secretary to determine within 90 days whether the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted and to determine within 12 months whether the listing is warranted, not warranted, or warranted but precluded (“12-month finding”). 16 U.S.C. §1533(b)(3)(A),(B).

On July 15, 2020, the Petitioners petitioned to list the Alexander Archipelago Wolf (*Canis lupus ligoni*) in Southeast Alaska. A 12-month finding was due July 15, 2021. To date, the Service has failed to determine whether listing is warranted. In failing to issue this required finding, the Service has abrogated its duty to ensure that the Alexander Archipelago wolf is timely protected to avoid further decline and an increased risk of extinction, in violation of Section 4 of the ESA. If the Secretary does not make the required finding or contact us to develop a timeline for making this finding within the next 60 days, we intend to file suit to enforce the Act.

Please contact me if you have any questions or if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,
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