

Yellowstone National Park is home to at least 95 **wolves**. NPS/Jim Peaco

On November 15, a Montana judge announced a temporary order that returns the state's wolf hunting regulations to 2020 quotas around Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park. Wolf management units, 313, 316, and 110 were all impacted. Based on the new order, only two **wolves** total can be taken in WMU 110 and only one wolf each in WMU 313 and 316. One wolf has already been harvested in WMU 113—meaning the order essentially closed that unit to hunting for the rest of the season. The one-wolf quota replaced a 6-wolf quota for WMU 313, as well as more liberal quotas for the other units, which had been reorganized before the 2021 season.

This temporary injunction comes after the Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission relaxed wolf hunting regulations in August 2021. The state then held a liberal 2021-2022 wolf hunting season in which 273 **wolves** were taken statewide by hunters and trappers, including 18 in GMU 313, three in GMU 316, and zero in 10. During the season, some **wolves** that frequent Yellowstone were taken near the park. Though legal, the hunts incited controversy. "These **wolves** are part of our balanced ecosystem here and represent one of the special parts of the park that draw visitors from around the globe," said Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Cam Sholly in September 2021. "We will continue to work with the state of Montana to make the case for reinstating quotas that would protect the core wolf population in Yellowstone as well as Montana's direct economic interests derived from the hundreds of millions spent by park visitors each year."

Despite the controversy, the Montana FWP recently reported that the state-wide wolf population was stable throughout 2021. According to the Montana FWP, "The estimated wolf population in Montana at the end of 2021 was 1,141. This was down only 40 **wolves** from 1,181 in 2020, which is not a statistically significant difference. In the last 10 years, wolf populations saw an estimated high of 1,256 in 2011 and a low of 1,113 in 2017. The small difference in these two numbers demonstrates a population trend that is very stable."

"We are following the law," said Montana FWP director Hank Worsech in a press release. "And are doing so in a way that provides certainty that wolf populations in Montana will remain off the Endangered Species List."

#### Anti-Hunting Groups Are Pushing for a Total Ban on Wolf Hunting in Montana

The plaintiffs in the case that spurred the state judge to temporarily reinstate some wolf hunting restrictions include Project Coyote and WildEarth Guardians. The anti-hunting groups are challenging Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the state of Montana, and the Fish and Wildlife Commission of Montana—and are seeking a permanent block of wolf hunting in the state.

The group's lawsuit overall makes several claims. The plaintiffs assert that "Montana has failed to manage the state's **wolves** for the benefit of the public as a whole in violation of the state's Public Trust Doctrine as enshrined in Montana's constitution." They also claim that the FWP's current population modeling assessment is inaccurate and has led the Fish and Wildlife Commission to permit overaggressive quotas.

Judge Christopher Abbott stated that "Based on the face of the Plaintiffs' filings, they have made colorable arguments that the State's current wolf management practices may violate state or federal law." His injunction pauses the wolf hunt around the National Parks to ensure that wolf kills do not limit "the court's ability to provide relief, should relief be found warranted." Importantly, Abbott has not heard the case in full but stated that "the complete cessation of wolf hunting [throughout the state] appears not to be the status quo. Indeed, Plaintiffs themselves acknowledge that, prior to 2020, wolf populations remained stable despite hunting activity."

According to the National Park Service, "Yellowstone **wolves** in the northern range spend an estimated 5 percent of the time outside the park, usually in late fall. For over a decade, the state of Montana limited the number of **wolves** taken from Montana wolf management units 313 and 316, which are immediately adjacent to the park's northern boundary."

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The Montana FWP will fight the injunction in court. "We have a healthy and stable population of **wolves** in Montana," said FWP Director Hank Worsech. "We've proven we can manage **wolves** across the state and will continue to do so. We will comply with the judge's order and look forward to the opportunity to defend good science and management strategies."

Aside from reinstating the quotas, the injunction restricts all hunters and trappers in Wyoming to five **wolves** total per person per season and prohibits the use of snares as a legal method for trapping **wolves**. Montana FWP will make legal arguments in this case at a hearing scheduled for Nov. 28. The court's temporary restraining order is set to expire on Nov. 29.

The post [Montana Judge Issues Temporary Order Restricting Wolf Hunting Near Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks](#) appeared first on [Field & Stream](#).

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