
September 14, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

The federal government's trust responsibility toward sovereign Indian nations dates back to the very beginning of the country. First acknowledged as early as 1831 in the trio of Supreme Court cases known as the "Marshall Trilogy," it was the Court's holding in *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1832 that laid the foundations for tribal sovereignty. This foundation has survived several eras in federal Indian policy. From termination and relocation to allotment and assimilation. We are now living in the era of self-determination, yet recent actions reminds us that we have much work to do.

In recent years, the federal government often has failed in its treaty and trust responsibility and its regulatory framework to engage in meaningful consultation with tribal nations. Time and again, the federal government has taken actions anathema to sovereign tribal nations, and the delisting of the gray wolf is an example.

We are well aware that you fully understand that as a land-based people, the rocks and soil that form our landscapes, and the plants and animals that live upon them, are central to our belief systems and make up the fabric that ties our communities together. Rather than respecting our way of life and honoring the hundreds of treaties, without any tribal input, the government has authorized oil drilling and mining, encouraged forest loggings, and decimated wildlife populations – ignoring the significance of land and animals to tribal communities. Most recently, and without engaging in the required consultation with Indian Country, the Trump administration delisted the gray wolf from the endangered species list, putting the wolf's tenuous recovery at risk. Not only did the federal government further erode tribal sovereignty by not consulting with Indian Country, this action by the federal government ignores our collective voices – Native voices – by failing to give any thought to our interests, sacred ceremonies, and cultures. Tribes should have the opportunity to participate in developing and implementing culturally sensitive wolf population management programs. By allowing tribes a seat at the table, through meaningful consultation, such solutions are possible.

Given the immediate threat facing the gray wolf as the result of states enacting anti-wolf policies that present a real potential of decimating wolf populations, we write to desperately urge you to **immediately act upon the emergency petition** filed on May 26, 2021, to relist the gray wolf as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Just as important, we also call on you to exercise existing authority to list the gray wolf as such on an emergency basis. Emergency listing is a temporary measure that ensures immediate protection and expires 240 days following the publication date. **This 240-day pause will allow the federal government to engage in proper and meaningful consultation with tribes.** Today, the wolf is functionally extinct in over 80% of its historic range, with only 6,000 surviving in the United States. Wolves figure prominently in the folklore of nearly every Native American tribe. In most Native cultures, the wolf is considered a medicine being associated with courage, strength, loyalty, and success at

hunting. Like bears, wolves are considered closely related to humans by many North American tribes, and the origin stories of some Northwest Coastal tribes tell of their first ancestors being transformed from wolves into men. In Shoshone mythology, the wolf plays the role of the noble Creator god, while in Anishinabe mythology a wolf character is the brother and true best friend of the culture hero. Among the Pueblo tribes, wolves are considered one of the six directional guardians, associated with the east and the color white, and associated with protection, ascribing to them both healing and hunting powers. Wolves are also one of the most common clan animals in Native American cultures. Tribes with Wolf Clans include the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Chippewa, Algonquian tribes like the Shawnee and Menominee, Iroquois tribes, Plains tribes like the Caddo and Osage, the Pueblo tribes of New Mexico, and Northwest Coastal tribes.

Had either the Trump or Biden Administrations consulted tribal nations, as treaty and trust responsibilities require, they would have heard that as a sacred creature, the wolf is an integral part of the land-based identity that shapes our communities, beliefs, customs, and traditions. The land, and all it contains, is our temple.

The Department of the Interior Secretarial Order No. 3206, Federal-Tribal trust responsibilities and the Endangered Species Act, is displayed on Fish & Wildlife Services website under the tab "working with tribes". The Secretarial Order lists a number of principles the Department endeavors to follow. Principle number 4 states the "Department shall be sensitive to Indian culture, religion and spirituality." In the appendix to the Order, dated June 5, 1997, under § 3., subsections B and C; the order reaffirms the right of tribes to participate fully in the listing process. Section 3(B)(6) states: "Having first provided the affected Indian tribe(s) the opportunity to actively review and comment on proposed listing actions, [the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service shall] provide affected Indian tribe(s) with a written explanation whenever a final decision on any of the following activities conflicts with comments provided by an affected Indian tribe: (i) list a species as endangered or threatened; (ii) designate critical habitat; (iii) reclassify a species from endangered to threatened (or vice versa); **(iv) remove a species from the list;** [emphasis added] or (v) designate experimental populations."

Finally, when President Biden took office, he loudly signaled to Indian Country his commitment to the responsibility this nation has to honor treaty and trust obligations to tribal nations. On January 26, 2021, less than a week into his presidency, the President issued an executive memorandum reaffirming the requirement that each executive agency, in accordance with Executive Order 13175 (November 6, 2000), consult with Tribal nations when making policies impacting Indian tribes.

As such, to avoid rendering President Biden's commitment and promise to Indian Country meaningless, and to put a hold on the continued slaughter of the gray wolf, we demand that you immediately grant the emergency relisting petition to give the federal government the chance to follow precedent and engage in consultation with tribes.

The failure to take action here, thus ignoring the concerns of tribal nations, would signal to Indian Country that President Biden's promises to Indian Country are hollow. Every concern matters, and thus, every tribal concern, and not some, must be the subject of meaningful consultation. There should be no exceptions, short cuts, and/or turning a blind eye to any matter impacting tribal interests. The failure of the Department of Interior to engage in meaningful consultation is a serious breach of trust, and we fully expect that you will understand this to be as such, and take the action that is required and grant an emergency listing. This would allow for the Biden Administration to not only show its commitment to Indian Country, but the proper

time to correct a wrong birthed by the previous administration. The delisting of the gray wolf without tribal consultation is a stain that we are certain you don't want to preserve under your leadership.

Sincerely,

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians



Association on American Indian Affairs



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Protecting Sovereignty • Preserving Culture • Educating Youth • Building Capacity
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Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association



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Native Justice Coalition



Navajo Nation



Oneida Nation of Wisconsin



Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council



Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council

Cc:

Bryan Newland
Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs

Shannon Aneal Estenoz
Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Tommy Beaudreau
Deputy Secretary

Martha Williams
Principal Deputy Director, Fish & Wildlife Service

Darryl LaCounte
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Elizabeth Washburn
Special Assistant to the President for Native Affairs

PaaWee Rivera
Senior Advisor for Intergovernmental Affairs and Director of Tribal Affairs at the White House