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Tribal involvement of wolves in Utah

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Wolves in Utah

8. Tribal Involvement

There is precedent for tribal cooperation in wolf recovery. For example, when the state of Idaho refused to participate in wolf reintroduction, the Nez Percé Tribe took responsibility (Nijhuis, 2001). The tribe manages wolves throughout the Central Idaho Recovery Area, although the Nez Percé Reservation includes only about 304 square km. Although we do not foresee a similar situation developing in Utah, the cooperation of Native Americans living and working in and around potential wolf habitat would seem essential. In particular, the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, managed by the Ute Tribe, includes a substantial portion of the largest contiguous area of high-quality wolf habitat in Utah (see Section 4.2). The Ute Tribe, at present, does not support wolf reintroduction (K. Corts, Ute Indian Tribe Fish and Wildlife Department, personal communication), although their position on natural recolonization is unclear.

A primary concern of the tribe is the potential for land-use restrictions as a result of critical habitat designation under the Endangered Species Act. We believe that significant restrictions are unlikely to occur under federal or state management. Little critical habitat was designated under the Northern Rockies Recovery Plan (E. Bangs, USFWS, personal communication), and no additional habitat is likely to be designated now, given that wolf populations are increasing without it. Similarly, no such designations have been implemented in Minnesota, Wisconsin, or Michigan. Furthermore, if a nonessential/experimental population is established, it is certain that no critical habitat would be designated (16 U.S.C.A. 1536 § 10(j)(2)(C)(ii)). It is possible, however, that temporary land use restrictions might be imposed near denning sites, depending on the specifics of the management plan.

A second concern is the potential impact on game permit sales, which currently generate \$300,000-\$400,000 annually from nonmembers. A related concern is the potential impact on Tribal members who hunt for subsistence. However, we believe these impacts would likely be minimal, based on our biological and economic analysis (see Sections 4.4.1 and 5.2.5). In any case, it will be important to monitor the effects of wolves on game populations in the area. Currently, there is limited cattle grazing on the northern part of the reservation, and there is some concern regarding the potential impact of wolves on that operation. Whatever the potential impacts may be, encouraging the participation of not only the Ute Tribe, but also Utah's other tribes, should be an integral part of the planning process. We suggest that a strongly participatory approach to the Ute Tribe would maximize the chances for successful collaboration. The presence of tribal members on the Wolf Advisory Committee will not only facilitate this process, but also help defuse any potential conflicts and misunderstandings.