

WISCONSIN Outdoor News



Hunting groups file appeal of wolf decision

By Jim Servi
Contributing Writer

Columbus, Ohio — The U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation and that group's partners filed an appeal Feb. 13 that seeks to overturn the Dec. 19 Great Lakes timber wolf ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Beryl Howell.

That ruling forced the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to return wolves found in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan to protective status under the Endangered Species Act. Since Howell's ruling, re-listing Great Lakes wolves, groups such as the USFWS, state wildlife agencies, and even state and federal politicians have been looking for options to return wolf management to wildlife biologists at the state level — where management responsibilities had been since January 2012.

Also in response to Howell's ruling that

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relisted wolves in December, national and state conservation groups have joined together to form the new Hunter Conservation Coalition. The HCC vows to "fight for sportsmen's rights, as well as for a state's right to scientifically manage wildlife within its borders," according to a statement in a press release from that group.

The HCC consists of the following organizations: U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation, Safari Club International, the National Rifle Association of America, the Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Michigan United Conservation Clubs, the Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, the Upper Peninsula Bear Houndsmen Association, the Michigan Hunting Dog Federation, and the Rocky

— Mountain Elk Foundation.

"It's unfortunate that we have to continue to fight this legal battle," said Evan Heusinkveld, USSA's vice president of government affairs. "There is no doubt that wolves in the region have recovered, but to hold their management in those states hostage until wolves are re-established in Central Park in New York City is ludicrous, and we will continue to fight."

Howell's ruling stemmed from a lawsuit brought by the following animal rights groups: the Humane Society of the United States; Born Free, USA; Help Our Wolves Live; and Friends of Animals and Their Environment. Howell essentially declared that wolves must be listed as endangered until they've recovered in all areas of their former range.

Sean Curran, HCC vice president of development and membership,

responded by stating, "The premise that they were re-listed just doesn't make sense. We've taken the lead on this issue because it's within our mission and makes sense for sportsmen."

This is the third time in the past 10 years that USSA and other sportsmen organizations have been involved in similar appeals. At this point, little is known about which judge will review the appeal or the expected timeline, but each time an appeal has been brought forward by USSA and its partners, the federal ruling has been overturned and timber wolves have been delisted.

Editor's note: While this appeal works its way through the federal courts, federal delegates are working on two bills in the House of Representatives that could delist gray wolves once and for all. For more on that effort, please see Dan Hansen's article on Page 10 of this issue.