

Fed: Wolverines not endangered

Effect of high-elevation warming is 'speculation'

By Mathew Brown
Associated Press

BILLINGS — A top federal wildlife official said there's too much uncertainty about climate change to prove it

threatens the snow-loving wolverine — overruling agency scientists who warned of impending habitat loss for the so-called "mountain devil."

There's no doubt that the

high-elevation range of wolverines is getting warmer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director NoREEN WALSH said.

But any assumption about how that will change snowfall

patterns is "speculation," Walsh said. She told her staff to prepare to withdraw a proposal to protect the animals under the Endangered Species Act.

Walsh's comments were contained in a May 30 memo obtained by the Center for Biological Diversity, an envi-

ronmental group. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Chris Tollefson confirmed that Walsh — who heads the agency's mountain-prairie region — authored the document.

Agency Director Dan

See WOLVERINES, 3A

Wolverines

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Ashe will have the final say, with a decision due Aug. 4.

The animals max out at 40 pounds and are tough enough to stand up to grizzly bears. Yet some scientists warn that they will be no match for anticipated declines in deep mountain snows, which female wolverines need to establish dens and raise their young.

Federal biologists last year proposed protections for an estimated 300 wolverines in the Lower 48 states. At that time, Walsh said "scientific evidence suggests that a warming climate will greatly reduce the wolverine's snow-pack habitat."

In the recent memo, she expressed the opposite view: "Due to the uncertainty of climate models, I cannot accept

the conclusion about wolverine habitat loss that forms the basis of our recommendation to list the species."

Walsh, also a biologist, said she reached that conclusion after reviewing the latest science on wolverines and consulting with other agency officials.

But most of that science already was available when protections were first proposed, leading Noah Greenwald of the Center for Biological Diversity to criticize the about-face. He said the likelihood of climate change harming wolverines was too great to delay action because of any lingering uncertainties.

"There is no reason to think they are going to be OK," Greenwald said.

Fish and Wildlife Service officials say Walsh's memo was just one step in the agency's deliberations over wolverines.

Once found throughout the Rocky Mountains and in California's Sierra Nevada mountain range, wolverines were wiped out across most of the U.S. by the 1930s due to unregulated trapping and poisoning campaigns. In the decades since, they have largely recovered in the Northern Rockies but not in other parts of their historical range.

In some areas, such as central Idaho, researchers have said suitable habitat could disappear entirely.

Wolverines are found in the Northern Rocky Mountains in Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Wyoming and the North Cascades in Washington. Individual wolverines have also moved into California and Colorado but have not established breeding populations.

Larger populations persist in Alaska and Canada.

Officials from Western

states including Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho had objected to more protections and said the animal's population has been increasing in some areas.

Two members of an independent peer review panel also raised questions about the science behind last year's proposal. They suggested that no direct link could be made between warming temperatures and less habitat.

Panelist Audrey Magoun, a researcher based in Alaska, said shifting weather patterns that come with a warming climate could mean more snowfall, not less, in the mountains where most wolverines den.

Wolverines were twice denied protections under the Bush administration. In 2010, the Obama administration delayed action on the issue and said other imperiled animals and plants had priority over wolverines.

prices right now, led by South Carolina at \$3.39 a gallon. Prices in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas range from \$3.42 to \$3.48.

Kelly said the proximity of southeastern states to many major refineries, as well as possibly shorter summer vacation trips could be helping to keep gas prices low there.

She said Montanans and residents of other rural mountain and plains states probably travel farther for summer recreation, or longer distances to see family than in smaller states, putting less pressure on demand. And the popularity of motor homes, campers and boats here adds to demand.

It's the demand

There's no big mystery to higher prices, other than increased demand, said Ronna Alexander, state executive at the Montana Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association.

She said events and ketts affect degree, but for the stre to global iss big event in

Summer blend

This is an Environmental Protection Agency requirement to lower the vapor pressure of gasoline during summer's warm weather, so gas doesn't, build up pressure in a vehicle's fuel tank.

"You always have that (summer blend) change coming right as the summer travel gears up," Galt said.

The blending requirements differ by state, he said, a reason why prices are high on the West Coast. "There are different additives required for air quality in California, Washington and Oregon."

Every additional regulation drives the price up, he said.

Alexander said her trade group's members aren't reporting that prices are going up every day, and "when prices get high it's harder for our members to recover that ... they make less money when the prices are high."

She also said a Billings

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL. 2013-14

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Exhibit No. 1

Pope

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since becoming pope, Francis has become one of the most recognized figures in the world in part because of

cover-ups, Catholic officials are obsessively fixed on policies and protocols," the Survivors Network of those

AMERICAN: 'THINGS ARE GOING TO CHANGE'