

SECRETARY OF INTERIOR HAALAND OPTS OUT OF RECEIVING HISTORIC WOLF TREATY FROM A TRIBAL DELEGATION FOR THE SECOND TIME IN A MONTH

STATEMENT ON THE MEETING HELD WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR 10-29-2021

Washington, DC - For the second time in a month, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland opted out of a scheduled meeting with a delegation of tribal leaders. On both occasions, Haaland's staff confirmed that the first Indigenous Interior Secretary would be present to receive the [Wolf Treaty](#) and to discuss growing concerns among Tribal Nations and the Indigenous community as the impacts of the Trump Administration's ESA wolf delisting rule escalates threats to not only the viability of the wolf, but also tribal treaty rights, sovereignty, consultation mandates, and traditional spiritual and religious freedoms.

Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Bryan Newland, stepped in for Haaland.

"They didn't answer any questions and they didn't ask any questions. Assistant Secretary Newland and his colleagues made notes but absolutely no commitments. In fact, they expressed very little. To call the meeting perfunctory would be an overstatement," said Rain, director of the film [Family](#), author of the Wolf Treaty, and executive director of the Global Indigenous Council.

One attendee observed that it was unclear if Newland had even read the Wolf Treaty as his did not respond affirmatively when directly asked by Rain. Presenting the treaty to Secretary Haaland was the purpose of the meeting. Over 700 Tribal Nations on both sides of the US-Canada border have signed the Wolf Treaty. In a written statement the delegation was asked to submit to the DOI prior to the meeting, the tribal representatives asserted:

"The treaty has been described as 'a blueprint' for contemporary wolf management and offers a pathway to move away and forward from the archaic practices that remain entrenched today, and which epitomize systemic and institutionalized racism - most of which were authored by the notorious white supremacist and eugenicist, Madison Grant. For Indigenous people, the ESA wolf delisting, and the now ongoing decimation of the wolf by white trophy hunters, trappers, and bounty hunters, isn't simply an 'environmental' or 'wildlife' issue, it is a social justice issue. The First People of the Land continue to be the last to be heard, despite President Biden's promises, which he again repeated in his statement on Indigenous Peoples' Day."

"We feel honored to have met with the Assistant Secretary Newland, but totally disappointed that the Secretary of Interior didn't reschedule an appointment so that we might meet with her personally. We believe that Secretary Haaland is the person to facilitate the implementation of some of the resolutions we presented to the wolf issue and others. 'Consultation' is an old, misused term; we're ready for free, prior, and informed consent, as emphasized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People," reflected Casey Camp-Horinek, Environmental Ambassador and Elder of the Ponca Nation.

The reason cited for Haaland's absence was her travel schedule, specifically her attendance at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland. Elder Camp-Horinek was traveling to COP26 after the wolf discussion Haaland sidestepped.

As the three DOI officials in attendance were unaware of it, the delegation had to furnish them with a [letter sent to Haaland by Senator Cory Booker](#) on October 28. The letter cites tribes' concerns on the wolf and calls on Haaland "to issue an emergency listing to restore temporary federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections to the gray wolf." Twenty-one of the most prominent US Senators in the Democratic Caucus signed on to the letter, including Bernie Sanders, Diane Feinstein, Elizabeth Warren, Sheldon Whitehouse, and Brian Schatz, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

One of the key issues cited in the letter and raised by the delegation was the Trump Administration's failure to engage in mandated "meaningful" and "thorough" government-to-government consultation with tribes while formulating the ESA wolf delisting rule that Haaland and the DOI is defending.

"Consultation without resolution and solution is meaningless. We've got to get to that level," said William F. Snell, Jr., executive director of the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council (RMTLC).

At the meeting, Snell presented a letter the RMTLC recently received from Principal Deputy Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Martha Williams. In the letter, Williams was offering to consult with RMTLC member tribes on ESA wolf delisting some ten months after the rule has been in effect. In July of this year, Williams conceded in a stakeholders' meeting that impacted tribes had not been consulted as required by law in the rule making process.

"We directly and very forcefully advocated on behalf of Indian Country and our sacred brother the wolf. But we also identified the issue. The issue does not lie within the Assistant Secretary's Office, the issue lies within the FWS. The problem is the FWS and its antiquated culture when it comes to the management of the wolf. We requested a follow up meeting to address FWS with the Secretary of Interior in the room," confirmed Tom Rodgers, president of the Global Indigenous Council.

On October 22, the White House nominated Martha Williams for Director of FWS. In her previous capacity as the Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Williams stood in direct opposition to tribes on preserving ESA protections for the grizzly bear in Greater Yellowstone.

Newland didn't respond when pressed by the delegation on Williams' actions, and he also remained silent when presented with disturbing images from the ongoing state-sanctioned wolf culls in Montana and Idaho.

"This is what passes for wolf management now in the Northern Rocky Mountain-Distinct Population Segment," Rain said to Newland. "And by the Secretary's inaction, this is what you're defending," he added.

Bills signed into law in Idaho and Montana allow for wolf populations in the states to be slashed by 90% and 85% respectively, and sanction wolf-killing by snaring, trapping, baiting, hounding, being crushed by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, the use of helicopters, and night vision technology for hunts after dark.

Chairman Tehassi Hill of the Oneida Nation cataloged some of the impacts on the tribal community following the spring wolf hunt in Wisconsin, during which tribal treaty rights were violated.

“In the meeting, we all had the opportunity to share our thoughts and our feelings as it relates to the wolf and the impact that the delisting has had within our respective areas. In Wisconsin it has been devastating. Thankfully, a Dane County judge issued a preliminary injunction on the fall hunt. Proper procedures weren’t followed by the state in its spring hunt. We will continue to work together to assure that mutual respect is accorded to our people and the wolf on our lands,” committed Chairman Hill.

The youngest member of the delegation, teenager Ari “Tashi” Amehae, wasn’t permitted to participate in the meeting despite previous written assurances that she could. Amehae was attending in honor of her late grandfather, Don Shoulderblade. [Shoulderblade was the founder of GOAL](#) (Guardians of Our Ancestors Legacy) Tribal Coalition, which was at the forefront of tribes’ victory to protect the grizzly bear and in the process defeated the Trump Administration, the National Rifle Association, Safari Club International, and the states of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming in federal court. Amehae had intended to provide a voice for tribal youth engaged with GOAL.

“The wheels of the Department turn slowly. Sometimes slower than we’d like,” was the most declarative statement Newland made in the meeting.

“Indian Country is united behind our brother wolf. We want strong leadership at the national level from Secretary Haaland to appropriately manage wolves and to hear our voices,” concluded James Holt, current executive director of the Buffalo Field Campaign and former Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee member.

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