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With wolf hunt vote set for Tuesday, UW expert rips proposal

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A gray wolf rests in tall grass in this undated photo provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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With the Natural Resources Board scheduled to vote on the final version of a fall wolf hunt Tuesday, a UW-Madison expert on wolf management says the agency's plan to allow hunting with dogs is unsafe and that the 201-wolf quota set for the proposed hunt is too high.

The board, which sets policy for the state Department of Natural Resources, is scheduled to meet in Stevens Point Tuesday for its monthly meeting. The agency is proposing that hunters be allowed to kill a total of 201 wolves out of a population of about 800 during a season that would begin Oct. 15 and run through the end of February.

The legislation ordering the DNR to establish the wolf hunt requires hunters be allowed to use dogs, hunt at night and

use bait to lure the wolves. The season has been supported by several hunting groups including the Bear Hunters Association, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and the Wisconsin Hunters' Rights Coalition.

But Adrian Treves, a UW-Madison expert on predators and prey, said in a letter to the board that "wolves and hounds will die in savage ways modern society abhors," if the DNR allows hunters to use dogs to hunt wolves.

Also, Treves said, the wolf season as proposed is likely to result in many more wolves being killed than anticipated, possibly driving the population low enough to force the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to return the animal to the endangered species list. He said such factors as the long season, new and untested hunting methods such as using bait and night hunting, and the statewide nature of the hunt are all likely to lead to the deaths of too many wolves.

Rob Bohman, chairman of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, disagreed and said the quota is

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ally lower than many hunters prefer. He said the quota is so conservative that it is highly likely there will be an impact on the overall wolf population.

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"It's conservative," Bohman said. "Would I like to have seen it higher? Sure, but we'll take what they give us."

Treves said he expects the season to be challenged in lawsuits because his surveys of the public on wolf management show the majority of people favor a season that keeps the wolf population at sustainable levels and also reduces wolf populations mostly in areas plagued by depredation. He said the proposed season would fail on both counts.

The DNR argues in a presentation prepared for Tuesday that it believes the quota of 201 wolves is conservative. But the agency also admits there are uncertainties that kept it from setting the number higher. Those unknowns include the level of illegal kills, level of mistaken kills and the impact of the season on reproduction of remaining wolves.

Tags

Wolf Hunt, Adrian Treves, Natural Resources Board, Rob Bohman, Bear Hunters Association, Wisconsin Department Of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Hunters' Rights Coalition

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