**Wolf Hunt Stirs Passions in Midwest**

**By** [**JOE BARRETT**](http://online.wsj.com/search/term.html?KEYWORDS=JOE+BARRETT&bylinesearch=true)

Hunters in the Upper Midwest are gearing up for the region's first-ever wolf-hunting season this fall, the latest sign of the comeback of an apex predator on the verge of being wiped out in the U.S. when it was placed under federal protection nearly four decades ago.

But animal-rights groups that have blocked such moves in the past could still sue to try to scuttle the plans. Critics also raise concerns about the potential cruelty of the hunt in Wisconsin, which is to allow hunting at night and the use of dogs.

For some, particularly farmers concerned about attacks on cattle and hunters who say wolves have reduced the number of deer, the hunt is long overdue.

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*Associated Press*

A gray wolf at the Wildlife Science Center in Forest Lake, Minn.

"A lot of people are just looking forward to getting the population down to a more reasonable level," said Mark A. Toso, president of the Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association.

There are about 3,000 wolves in Minnesota, 800 in Wisconsin and 700 in Michigan—far above the federal goals for sustainable populations of 1,400 in Minnesota and 100 in Wisconsin and Michigan combined.

Legislatures in Wisconsin and Minnesota quickly pushed through laws authorizing hunts after wolves were removed from protection under the Endangered Species Act for the third time in January. Michigan doesn't plan hunts so far.

But defenders of the wolves counter that since the delisting, farmers have gotten enough flexibility to kill wolves that threaten livestock and pets—and that the predators should be allowed to play their role keeping deer and other animals in check.

"We believe there's no biological reason to hunt wolves in either state. The hunts are basically recreational killing," said Howard Goldman, Minnesota director of the Humane Society of the United States. The animal-welfare group successfully reversed the removal of wolves from protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act twice in recent years and is considering another lawsuit since they were delisted for the third time in January.

The gray wolf, a pack hunter weighing up to 130 pounds that rarely attacks humans, was exterminated in most of the contiguous 48 states by the 1950s, but a few survived in heavily forested northern Minnesota. After wolves were placed under federal protection in 1974, the population slowly increased and spread into Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

While the comeback generally has been hailed as a success story by environmentalists, wolves have returned to only about 5% of their former hunting grounds in the U.S. And they remain highly controversial in those places.

Separately, the gray wolf was also reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park—which is located primarily in Wyoming and extends into Idaho and Montana—as well as into elsewhere in Idaho in the 1990s. Wolves in Montana and Idaho were removed from federal protection in 2009 and hunts have been held there since. Wyoming is working on a delisting plan that would allow hunting.

Minnesota last week laid out proposed ground rules for two short hunting seasons with a combined quota of 400 animals and a goal of keeping the wolf population around 3,000, where it has hovered for the past few years, state officials said.

In Wisconsin, a state board last week gave the go-ahead for the Department of Natural Resources to set wolf-hunting quotas for a hunt whose parameters were largely set out in legislation signed by Gov. Scott Walker in April. The goal in Wisconsin is to gradually reduce the population from at least 800 to somewhere above 350, a state target designed to be sustainable for wolves and acceptable to humans, state officials said.

Some scientists and defenders of the wolves say the Wisconsin rules are too lenient for hunters—and too cruel for the wolves. At up to 4½ months, "the season is too long; it covers too wide of an area and it comes with too many untested methods," including using dogs and allowing night hunts, said Adrian Treves, an associate professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who studies predator-prey ecology.

Officials say night hunting will involve limited use of flashlights and hound hunters are likely to go slow as they learn how to track a new prey. "They're going to make sure they have well-trained dogs" before taking off in large numbers against animals as fierce as wolves, said Kurt Thiede, lands division administrator for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Kelly Shepard, a hunting and fishing guide in Grand Marais, Minn., near the Canadian border, said his phone has been ringing off the hook with prospective wolf hunters from all over the U.S. and as far away as New Zealand. But he has bad news for them: "I tell them it's going to be the hardest hunt they've ever been on." In his 30 years of hunting in the wolf-rich area between Lake Superior and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Mr. Shepard has happened upon a wolf unawares only once. "They're smart," he says. "The wolves are going to have the upper hand."

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**Corrections & Amplifications**  
Kelly Shepard's last name was misspelled as Shephard in an earlier version of this article.

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