

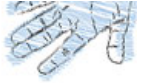
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Wisconsin's wolf management becomes political



Associated Press

The DNR set a goal of 251 wolves for this hunting season, which will run through the end of February.

By *Laura Menefee*

Nov. 8, 2013

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This year, the long-standing Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Wolf Science and legislatively mandated Stakeholders Committees were wiped out by order of the DNR secretary. In their place, the Wolf Advisory Committee was created, membership "by invitation only" from the DNR Secretary. Twenty-five of the 26 members are wolf removal agents.

Meanwhile, members of the Bear Hunters' Association instigated resolutions to cull Wisconsin wolves in 18 counties -- the same bear hunters who were instrumental in the expedited implementation of wolf hunting and trapping legislation, mandating the use of dogs on wolves, even though the majority of Wisconsin residents oppose the use of dogs on wolves, as demonstrated both in polls and in the Conservation Congress Hearings.

Although the Wolf Advisory Committee may have considered data presented by University of Wisconsin faculty, who have been barred by the DNR secretary from sitting on wildlife committees, the membership has not followed scientifically informed recommendations. They rejected the well-defended need for refuge areas. They also rejected the need for more conservative quotas. Additionally, they have rejected findings in social science, specifically the research of Dr. Adrian Treves and the Carnivore Coexistence Lab that indicates hunting does *not* "increase social tolerance."

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Sustained Yield recommendations presented to the Wolf Advisory Committee pertaining to Wisconsin's wolf population have not been followed. According to Sustained Yield theory, which analyzes both compensatory and additive mortality effects on wildlife populations, Wisconsin may sustain an annual harvest of 43 wolves without significantly destabilizing the population.

According to this well-established model for wildlife management, attempting to manage Wisconsin's wolf population to an arbitrarily and unscientifically established number -- 350, or about 40% of the present population -- risks repeat extirpation and a return to federal management.

That Wisconsin's winter wolf count represents a minimum population is often cited by people who do not advocate for wolf conservation. What is not often cited is that 75% of wolf pups do not survive their first winter.

Additionally, 25% of wolf adults die annually. Additionally, when we non-selectively kill wolves that are existing on the landscape without causing conflict with humans, we may encourage higher rates of livestock depredation since a pack can kill livestock more easily and with fewer members.

We used to rely on our DNR biologists, the experts in wildlife management, to inform our policies in wildlife management. There was a time when the DNR secretary was not politically appointed. However, DNR biologists have been muzzled with apparent threats of retaliatory action, and UW faculty barred from sitting on decision making committees. Also, the citizen-based population monitoring was severely compromised when about 40% of Wisconsin volunteer wolf trackers resigned in protest of the hastily implemented 2011 hunting season.

Proponents of retaining federal protections for wolves argue that just this type of politically based management does not protect or sustain the ecological benefits of apex predators on the landscape, nor does it serve in any way to increase public tolerance through education.

It appears humans need more than 40 years for fear-based hatred to evolve to understanding and coexistence.

Laura Menefee is wolf and predator conservation chair, Executive Committee, Conservation Committee, Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter.

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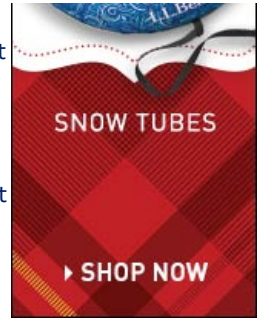
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