

Column: Wisconsin wolf cull puts gains at risk

By Laura Menefee 6:31 a.m. CDT October 23, 2014



(Photo:
Submitted/Linda
Nelson)

Because "Wisconsin has a long tradition of ethical hunting behavior," wolf hounders are being asked to "voluntarily" submit wolf carcasses for inspection. Only "a small proportion of wolves will be evaluated and hunters with known aggressive encounters are unlikely to voluntarily participate," according to the proposal.

Nevertheless, the lobby most responsible for the fast-tracked Act 169 supports the "voluntary guideline," hoping to "put to rest" concerns about using dogs to hunt wolves. There is no plan to repeat this voluntary guideline. There are no requirements to report the number of dogs injured or killed while hunting wolves.

Bear hounders, being "as territorial as wolves are," according to one Wisconsin DNR officer, eliminated the entire Ranger Island pack this year, its last wolf found in a trap after season closure. They assert they and their hounds have greater right to public forested lands than wolves do. Wisconsin instituted hound depredations payments in response to hounders' threats, "If you want wolves in this state, then you better keep those payments comin'." Only Wisconsin pays for hunting hounds killed or injured by wolves, about \$500,000 to date.

A 2009 study by Joseph Bump at Michigan Technological University shows wolf/dog conflicts are most likely to occur near bear baiting stations, because "wolves colonize those areas." Michigan has a shorter baiting period, so fewer wolf/dog conflicts occur, "even taking into account the lack of reporting incentive payments provide," Bump states. But bear hounders continue to call for a cull of Wisconsin's wolves to "350 or less."



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In the early years of wolf recovery, when little was known about the way wolves colonize, the Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan proposed a range of 350-500 wolves as a threshold above which the population could be considered healthy. Anti-wolf lobbyists later converted "threshold" to "cap," and the DNR Administration deleted the reference to "500" as part of that range.

Twenty-two thousand black bears in Wisconsin, double the 11,000 management goal, are not managed to a population "cap," even with a record 1,063 complaints in 2012. A similar "non-numerical" approach to wolf population objectives was proposed at a recent meeting of the WDNR Wolf Advisory Committee by Mammalian Ecologist, Adrian Wydeven, and supported by Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Peter David. Committee Chair, David MacFarland quickly discarded that proposal.

While Black bears cause personal, property and agricultural damage in Wisconsin second only to White-tailed deer, accounting for 18.3 percent of the state's \$2 million annual wildlife abatement payouts, wolves bother less than 1 percent of farms in Wisconsin. Nevertheless, the Cattlemen's Association perceives the presence of any wolves as a threat to food production, asking "Do you want food, or do you want to hear a wolf howl?"

The DNR promotes recreational trophy hunting and trapping as a means of curbing the already low incidence of depredation by wolves. However, a 2010 study to correlate nuisance complaints with black bear hunting, authored by Adrien Treves of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and Carnivore Coexistence Lab, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and David MacFarland, WDNR, concluded that recreational trophy hunting "did not show clear evidence of reducing nuisance complaints...because hunting was not effectively designed for that goal."

DNR also advocates recreational trophy hunting as a way to promote "social tolerance." However, in a recent issue of Science, Treves and Jeremy Bruskotter, Ohio State University School of Environment and Natural Resources documented "a decline in tolerance and an increase in intention to poach wolves...following the first-ever regulated wolf harvest in Wisconsin."

Peter David of GLIFWC agrees a generalized, non-selective "recreational hunt" does not address depredation, which must be dealt with swiftly and precisely. He likewise advises "voluntary inspection" of wolf carcasses taken with dogs "will not provide needed data." Nevertheless, WDNR plans to contract Wildlife Services to inspect carcasses; the same agency WDNR contracts to verify depredations payments for bear hounds.

Laura Menefee is a member of the Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter, National Wolfwatchers Coalition and the Coalition of Wisconsin Wolf Trackers.

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