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## Wis. wolf population falls following hunting season



by NYAL MUEENUDDIN

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Amid continuing controversy about hunting Wisconsin's gray wolves, preliminary data shows Wisconsin's wolf population has decreased by 19 percent over the past year due to hunting and trapping across the state.

According to the [report](#) released by the Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin's wolf population at the end of this winter sat at a minimum of 658, down from 809 wolves last year.

"The Wolf Advisory Committee last year recommended a more aggressive harvest to start bringing the population down towards the goal that is stated in the 1999 Wolf Management Plan, which is 350 animals," Jane Wiedenhoeft, assistant large carnivore biologist at the DNR, said.

The decrease this year is the first major decline in Wisconsin's wolf population since the grey wolf's addition to the federal endangered species list in 1974. Wisconsin's wolf population hit an all time low in 1979 with 25 wolves, Wiedenhoeft said.

After the species was removed from the Endangered Species List in 2012, 117 wolves were killed by hunters in the first regulated wolf hunt in Wisconsin history, according to DNR [figures](#).

“Opinions differ on how many wolves are good for the state. Some people think we could have more wolves in the state, and others think we could have much fewer wolves in the state. We’re trying to find that balance between what people can tolerate and what is a sustainable number,” Wiedenhoeft said.

With the removal of the gray wolf from the endangered species list in 2012 came a variety of changes in the ways in which Wisconsin’s wolf population is monitored, as well as what information is shared with the public, a topic of concern for some wildlife biologists.

University of Wisconsin environmental studies professor Adrian Treves, an expert on public opinion about wolves, raised concerns regarding the DNR’s new reporting processes.

“Wisconsin has had a long tradition of transparency and openness in the presentation and analysis and interpretation of data of the wolf population,” Treves said. “For almost 30 years, it’s been a public process with quite a bit of participation and transparency until the end of January 2012.”

The monitoring processes for wolves have not changed other than the addition of wolf harvest data from across the state, Wiedenhoeft said.

The meeting in which preliminary wolf count data is shared and discussed was moved behind closed doors for the first time this year, while it was previously public, she said.

Treves said this new practice reduced transparency for the scientific community

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because the methods have changed, the reporting has changed, and I’m not able to evaluate the quality of the data in the way I was able to do for the last 14 years,” Treves said.

Wiedenhoeft said the purpose of moving the meeting to a staff-only setting was to prevent information about wolf numbers and locations from reaching hunters

keen on finding wolf hot spots.

With significant concerns among conservationists regarding the state's current goal of 350 wolves, more than double the current population, the DNR in coordination with the Wisconsin Wolf Advisory Committee are currently working on an updated quota for wolf populations in the state, she said.

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