

Cathy Kangas: Tell Ron Johnson to protect Wisconsin's wolves

Wisconsin voters are concerned about many issues including a slow-growing economy, decaying infrastructure, making college education affordable and funding for public schools.

So why is Sen. Ron Johnson focusing his attention on removing federal protection for wolves in the Great Lakes region? His state has more pressing needs, and his action comes even though more than 50 world-renowned wildlife biologists and scientists have urged Congress to oppose any efforts to strip federal protection for wolves in the contiguous 48 states.

In addition, last week Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey and Barbara Boxer of California spearheaded an effort on behalf of 25 Democratic senators to urge President Obama to reject any bill with an anti-wolf or anti-Endangered Species Act thrust.

Why should Wisconsin residents care about wolves? These animals perform necessary functions that preserve the fragile ecosystem. They move sedentary deer and elk populations so they don't overgraze. They rid forests of sick or weak animals as well as contribute to preventing deer depredation on crops. In addition, they are a much-loved wilderness icon and there are only 5,500 of them left in the lower 48 states.

Animal welfare groups are proposing that the federal government classify wolves as threatened rather than endangered, which would allow "lethal management to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts." This is a compromise that would balance the national interest of protecting wolves while allowing state and federal agencies the ability to selectively control wolves that threaten livestock and property.

Instead of accepting this plan, Johnson and Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming have introduced legislation that would order the Department of the Interior to renew previous laws lifting protection for the wolves in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Wyoming. They also do not want the courts in those states to

intervene on behalf of wolves.

The Humane Society of the United States supports federal protection for wolves through laws and court rulings. Last November, Michigan voters overwhelmingly rejected a trophy-hunting season on wolves. Trophy hunting is a despicable practice of killing an animal in order to mount his head on a wall in the hunter's home. This has nothing to do with preserving the ecosystem or protecting crops. The fact that first-ever statewide votes on the issue of wolf hunting happened in Michigan — a state with a major hunting and agriculture industry — demonstrates that people understand the ecological benefits that wolves provide and realize they need to be protected.

Wisconsin voters need to contact Johnson's office at 202-224-5323, or [fill out the email form](#) on his official website and ask him to protect the state's wolf population, not destroy it. The vote is coming up soon, so don't delay.

Cathy Kangas is a member of the board of directors of the Humane Society of the United States.

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