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# Inclination to illegally kill wolves persists in Wisconsin, study finds

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Legal wolf hunting did not affect attitudes or inclinations to kill wolves illegally in Wisconsin, according to a study recently [published in \*Biological Conservation\*](#), part of a special issue of the journal examining non-compliance with conservation rules.

Led by Christine Browne-Núñez while a postdoctoral fellow at the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, the researchers examined policy effects on attitudes and inclinations toward wolves among farmers and hunters in Wisconsin's wolf range. Poaching, or the illegal taking of wildlife, has been a significant source of mortality in Wisconsin's wolf population since the 1980s.

Focus group discussions and an anonymous survey before and after a suite of changes in wolf policy and management in the state – including the removal of gray wolves from the federal endangered species list in 2012 and, soon thereafter, the approval of Wisconsin's first legalized wolf-harvest season – revealed that majorities of respondents held negative attitudes toward wolves with no decrease in inclination to poach.

The researchers conclude that lethal-control measures including government culling and regulated hunting may be ineffective for increasing tolerance in the short term. The findings could help inform future interventions designed to increase tolerance of wolves and other controversial species.

At UW-Madison, Browne-Núñez studied carnivore coexistence in the lab of environmental studies associate professor [Adrian Treves](#), a coauthor on the study. She is now a conservation social scientist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Fort Collins, Colo., and previously worked on community-based conservation education projects at the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research.

Another recent study from Treves' lab [found that attitudes toward wolves continue to decline](#) among residents of Wisconsin's wolf range, even after the legalization of wolf hunting in 2012. While wolf hunting is again illegal in the state — wolves were relisted as a federally endangered species in 2014 — the authors suggest that policymakers and wildlife managers might consider other ways to improve social tolerance and reduce conflict between the animals and people going forward.

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