

Summit seeks state control of wolves

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(Photo: Gary Kramer, Associated Press)

Advocates who want the state to manage the gray wolf will meet Thursday in northwestern Wisconsin to support a return of hunting and trapping seasons to help control the animal's burgeoning population.

Organized by two Republican legislators, the [Great Lakes Wolf Summit \(https://www.eventbrite.com/e/great-lakes-wolf-summit-tickets-26639963849\)](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/great-lakes-wolf-summit-tickets-26639963849) aims to bring together parties in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan who want their respective states to once again regulate wolves, including through the use of lethal controls.

The three states lost much of that power when a federal judge in December 2014 put wolves in the western Great Lakes back on a list of federal endangered species.

Judge Beryl Howell, a U.S. District Court judge in Washington, D.C., ruled (<http://archive.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/report-judge-orders-gray-wolves-return>)that removing wolves from the list of endangered species had been "arbitrary and capricious" and fell short of protecting wolves in the region.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services appealed the ruling, and members of Congress, including Republican Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, have proposed legislation to ban courts from overruling the delisting and allow the three states to manage their wolf populations.

But animal protection groups believe wolves must remain protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, in part, because they have not sufficiently recolonized in their historic range.

The opposing views underscore the ongoing debate over how best to care for a species that, despite differing notions on management, has staged a remarkable comeback.

Between 2012 and 2014, the Department of Natural Resources conducted hunting and trapping seasons for wolves. But starting in 2015 after the judge's ruling, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan lost controls.

The result: The DNR estimated that Wisconsin's minimum wolf population stood at 866 to 897 during the winter of 2015-16 — a 16% increase over the previous winter.

Last winter's count was the highest since the 1970s when wolves, once eradicated from the state, returned to northern Wisconsin from Minnesota.

As the wolves rebounded, their presence on the landscape grew increasingly controversial. In recent years, there have been a growing number of reports of wolves harassing and killing livestock, hunting dogs and pets, according to the DNR.

"Two things are happening," said Sen. Tom Tiffany (R-Hazelhurst), who organized the upcoming meeting in Cumberland with Rep. Adam Jarchow (R-Balsam Lake.)

"Wolves are becoming increasingly more aggressive, and they are steadily moving farther south in the state. In many areas of the north, wolves have run out of groceries and they're moving south."

Tiffany expects 150 to 200 people to attend Thursday's meeting, which will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Das Lach Haus, 1788 Elm St.

Speakers include Ted B. Lyon, co-author of the "The Real Wolf," an advocate of more controls.

Also speaking will be Bruce Mahler, the police chief of the city and township of Marenisco in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, near Presque Isle in Vilas County.

Mahler told The Northwoods River News in early February (<http://www.rivernewsonline.com/main.asp?SectionID=6&SubSectionID=59&ArticleID=71229>)that he is receiving more reports of wolves roaming onto roads and getting closer to people. One morning, he found a wolf on his porch, he told the newspaper.

So far in 2016, wolves have killed at least 30 hunting dogs in Wisconsin. That's a record, said David MacFarland, the DNR's large carnivore specialist, who expects more dogs will be killed this fall.

Since the court decision, the DNR has relied primarily on nonlethal tactics to control wolves, including lights and noise, and the use of guard dogs and electric fences. Last year, crews erected 19 miles of temporary electric fencing. A similar amount is in place this year.

"But more and more, we are moving to a permanent situation at these farms," MacFarland said.

Adrian Wydeven ran the DNR's wolf recovery program from 1990 to 2013. He said protecting the wolves as an endangered species worked for years, but "as the population has recovered, management is supposed to go back to the states."

Wydeven now coordinates the Timber Wolf Alliance at Northland College. He and a group of more than two-dozen scientists in November 2015 urged (<http://archive.jsonline.com/sports/outdoors/scientists-want-wolves-removed-from-endangered-list-b99618958z1-351599411.html>) that wolves (<http://archive.jsonline.com/sports/outdoors/scientists-want-wolves-removed-from-endangered-list-b99618958z1-351599411.html>) in the western Great Lakes be removed from the list of endangered species (<http://archive.jsonline.com/sports/outdoors/scientists-want-wolves-removed-from-endangered-list-b99618958z1-351599411.html>).

But another group of more than 70 scientists and experts, including Adrian Treves of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, disagreed.

The group said data show the public is more tolerant of wolves (http://faculty.nelson.wisc.edu/treves/reports/Wolf_conservation_letter_70_scientists_&_scholars_30Nov2015.pdf) than commonly assumed. They also raised questions about the accuracy of Wisconsin's population estimates. And they questioned whether wolves will maintain sustainable populations under state hunting and trapping plans.

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