

A controversial week of wolf hunting is planned for the final week of February

Season opens with a drawing results on Feb. 22nd.



By [Colton Molesky](#)

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MADISON, Wis. (WMTV) - The DNR is opening a wolf-hunting season in Wisconsin for the first time since 2014, following a contentious ruling from a Jefferson County Judge.

Gray Wolves were taken off the endangered species list on January 4th, and the DNR’S policy board voted 4-3 to hold off on a season until next November, saying they did not have the time to adequately prepare for a hunt. Part of the preparation that goes into the season that spans from November through February is consulting local tribes, per treaty agreements.

That’s when a Kansas Based hunting rights organization, Hunter Nation, sued the DNR for an infringement of hunter’s rights. The Jefferson Court ruled in favor of the group, leading to a week-long season, from February 22nd to the 28th. Along with the hunter’s rights to hold a season, the push for a wolf season also includes preserving livestock in rural areas.

However, Adrian Treves, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is concerned about the quick opening of a season. He says the population’s data is not current enough to justify holding a season without putting the wolf population in a tenuous situation.

A major reason for this is overhunting. In each of the previous three seasons from 2012-2014, wolves were overhunted. Since each hunter must report when a wolf is killed, it takes some time for the DNR to track when they have hit a harvest goal and close the season. And that is only accounting for hunter-killed wolves, which Treves says are not the only wolves impacted by wolf hunting.

“They live in highly structured units called packs, and when one member of a pack is killed by a hunter or some other cause, that pack sometimes breaks up, the family breaks apart,” said Treves. “We’ve studied this problem in Michigan with the state’s lethal control program for wolves, and my lab found that the risk for livestock in the following months actually tripled.”

Treves also argues that hunting wolves does not save livestock; it actually farmers more susceptible to wolves eating their livestock.

“The science says that we can protect livestock better with non-lethal methods electric fencing livestock guard dogs, human guarding and so forth,” said Treves. “Other visual deterrents like fox lights, we know how to protect livestock the farmers actually need the support of the state to install those non-lethal defenses.”

He added that wolves don’t negatively impact the deer population. Treves says there are over one million deer in the state, and hunters kill roughly 400,000 annually. Another 50,000 are killed by vehicles, and wolves eat just 25,000.

The DNR will issue 4,000 permits with the goal of harvesting 200 wolves. As of April 2020, there were 1,195 wolves in the state. The state is currently appealing the Jefferson County Court’s decision to open a season.

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