

The Case for Scientific Wolf Management in Michigan

Continued Commitment to Sound Management

Beginning in the early 1990s, the state of Michigan established a firm commitment to the protection and management of wolves. An annual "Michigan Wolf Awareness Week" observed during the month of October, was established in 1992. Additionally, DNR Director Roland Harmes appointed a 10-member Michigan Gray Wolf Recovery Team in July 1992, which he charged with the task of developing a wolf recovery plan for Michigan. The "Michigan Gray Wolf Recovery and Management Plan" was completed and signed by the Director on December 15, 1997.

Population Recovery!

Estimated at only 20 animals in 1992, the Upper Peninsula wolf population has grown to near 700 animals recently.

Federal delisting criteria required a combined Michigan/Wisconsin population of 100 wolves for five consecutive years for delisting to occur. The Michigan/Wisconsin combined population has exceeded 100 wolves every year since 1994, and currently numbers more than 1,500 wolves. The Michigan Wolf Recovery and Management Plan (1997) defined a viable population as 200 animals for five consecutive years to allow removal from the state endangered species list. The Michigan wolf population has exceeded 200 animals for more than two decades.

What Happened to Scientific Management?

The DNR made a firm commitment to the scientific management of Michigan wolves to both preserve the existence of wolves in Michigan for future generations – and then to manage those wolves at sustainable levels that protected the wolves themselves from attaining populations that exceeded the available prey or led to increases in disease among wolves. The no management option is not a scientific option.

Conflicts

An unmanaged wolf population causes "intolerable" conflicts with farmers and outdoorsmen that think they have to take matters into their own hands. The DNR has increased investigation, prosecution and fines of wolf poaching cases –to protect the population until state wolf management is allowed. Other wolf-human conflicts include:

- Houndsmen have had to avoid many of their favorite spots because hunting hounds were getting killed.

- Several U.P. trappers are reporting that they have to release an average of 4-5 wolves for every 25 to 30 coyotes they harvest, many with assistance of DNR personnel (and releasing a 100# wolf from a trap is not their favorite outdoor activity!).
- Bikers, hikers and others are afraid to get out to some of their favorite areas without a 357 magnum, or similar side-arm on their hip.
- From 1996-2000, 142 pets were killed or injured by wolves, many from their yards. How many other pets disappeared and were not reported?
- Livestock are being killed and farmers sometimes have a difficult time proving a wolf was the cause and receiving just compensation.
- Whitetail deer are nearly depleted in some areas with high concentrations of wolf packs.
- The list goes on.

The need for a managed, yet sustainable reduction in wolf numbers in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan seems obvious to most outdoorsman and yet very little could be done up to now because of federal listing in the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

What is the Solution?

Wolves are fully recovered in Michigan (they have been for many years) and are now federally delisted. The time for scientific management by Michigan is NOW. The time for hunting and trapping seasons for wolves is NOW. The time for a reduction in the wolf population to a scientifically controlled level is NOW.

It seems so simple to those of us who love and enjoy the great outdoors. The Michigan National Resources Commission needs to stand up to both those who want every wolf dead and to those who don't want a single wolf in the entire nation to be killed for any reason. The Michigan NRC needs to do what they have been charged to do: **To manage Michigan's wildlife and natural resources on the basis of sound scientific wildlife and fisheries management as required under the Scientific Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (PA 281 of 2014) and based on the foundation of Proposal G of 1996.** There is plenty of time in 2021 to set a limited season similar to the last one in 2013, including trapping this time as well as hunting over the entire Upper Peninsula. Without trapping, eliminating problem animals and achieving meaningful population goals will not only be handicapped but unlikely to be met. Any additional surveys and updates to the current wolf plan should be done in conjunction with a 2021 wolf season.

