

Wisconsin Wolf Management Update

July 10, 1999

In March of this year the DNR released a 2nd draft of a wolf management plan for public review. The plan would determine management of wolves in Wisconsin as a state threatened species, and eventually as delisted as neither endangered or threatened. Wolf populations have grown from 15 wolves in 1985, to 200 at the end of winter 1999, and wolves will be reclassified from state endangered to threatened later this year.

A 45-day public review of the wolf plan was held from March 19 to May 5, 1999, with an additional 10-day extension to May 15. During the review, 53 letters and 39 e-mail messages were received on the wolf plan. A roundtable discussion was also held on the wolf plan with 14 individuals on April 24, members of the discussion group reflected concerns of various hunting groups, conservation organizations, Native Americans, environment groups, industrial foresters, wildlife biologists, and agricultural organizations.

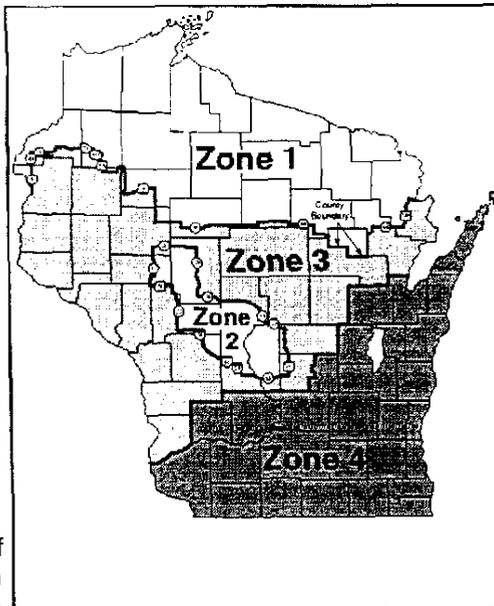
Over 1200 media notices were sent out to describe the new version of the wolf plan, and wolf advisory committee members held many interviews. Additionally meetings were held with various groups across the state to discuss concerns with the wolf plan.

Based on this public input process, modifications were made in the wolf plan being sent to the Wisconsin Natural Resource Board for its meeting in Hayward on August 24-25. Modifications added to the plan include the following:

Elimination of formal Wolf Core Area as a refuge system for wolves. Draft 2 had included recommendation that a formal Wolf Core Area system be used to determine areas closed to all forms of lethal control within Zone 1 of northern Wisconsin. This sanctuary system was proposed to protect a relatively small wolf population from excessive mortality. The Core Areas were intended only to guide lethal control activities on problem wolves, but not to restrict land use activities. Many concerns were expressed that Core Areas

would lead to major restrictions of human activities within these areas. The wolf advisory committee felt it would be possible to provide similar levels of protection, by using a more flexible system of dealing with nuisance wolves. Lethal control on problem wolves would be handled on more of a cases-by-case system within Zone 1, and generally wolves would not be killed on public land in areas of suitable wolf habitat. Unlike the Core system whereby all problem wolves would be protected in Core areas, but could readily be destroyed outside the Core; under the new system lethal control would be determined on each individual situation.

Removal of a five year moratorium on considerations of a public harvest. The draft 2 plan had recommended that the DNR wait for 5 years after the plan passing before considering a public harvest. Because many people feared the wolf population



would grow too fast before public harvest could be considered, the wolf advisory committee recommended that public harvest could be considered after the population goal of 350 is achieved. The committee felt the population goal of 350 is not likely to be achieved in less than 4 to 5 years. Public harvest would only be considered if other forms of mortality fail to hold the population near the goal including: natural mortality, illegal kill, vehicle collisions and other accidents, wolves controlled by USDA-Wildlife Services, wolves controlled by land owners, and nuisance wolves controlled by law enforcement officers. The plan

says that within 2 years before the population goal is likely to be achieved, the Department will start work on changing State Statutes to allow possibility of a public harvest. Establishment of a public harvest will require public meetings, hearings, and Legislative approval.

The wolf plan will maintain a state delisting level of 250 wolves outside Native American res-

ervations. Once delisting occurs limited landowner controls could be allowed on wolves, and the population management goal would be 350 outside Native American reservations. The population management goal is the level at which proactive or preventive trapping could be done by government trappers, and at which a public harvest can be considered.

Intense levels of population monitoring will be maintained for the next 5 years, and will perhaps be further intensified. The delisting and population management goals will be based on current counting systems, but the Department will explore other possible population estimations that may supplement current counting methods, and may be used in setting future goals.

Annual meetings will be held to evaluate the plan, and an intense public review of the plan including the population management goal will be done in 5 years.

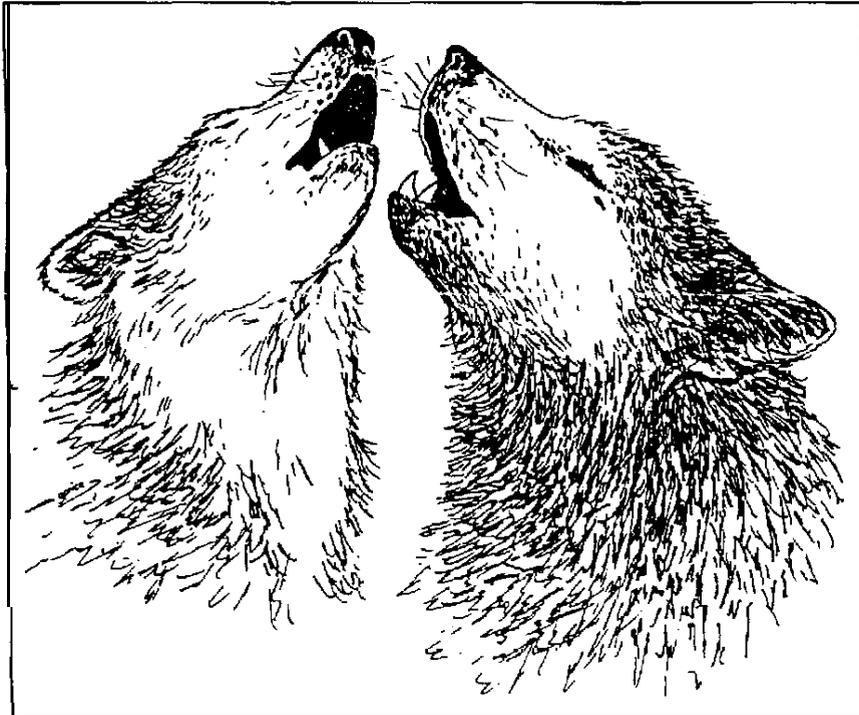
The wolf plan provides more language on the role of

Native Americans

in wolf management. The delisting level and population management goals set for Wisconsin represents wolves counted outside Native American reservations, because wildlife on tribal lands are not regulated by the State.

The wolf management plan being sent to the Natural Resource Board contains 14 strategies developed through the 2 drafts and recently modified including the following:

1. Manage wolves in 4 different management zones.
2. Intensely monitor the wolf population, and considered statutory change if the population goal is likely to be achieved.
3. Monitor wolf health.
4. Cooperatively manage wolf habitat.
5. Control nuisance wolves and reimburse for losses caused by wolves.
- 6 Promote public education on wolves.
- 7 Establish regulations for adequate legal protec-



tion for threatened and delisted wolves.

8. Encourage interagency cooperation
9. Establish a system of program guidance
10. Encourage programs for volunteer assistance on wolf conservation.
11. Recommend future wolf research.
12. Establish regulations on wolf-dog hybrids and captive wolves.
13. Design protocol for handling wolf specimens.
14. Encourage reasonable ecotourism on wolves and their habitats.

The wolf management plan can go into affect only after Natural Resources Board approval. If the Board approves the plan, final copies of will be sent to all persons on the current wolf plan mailing list, and be available at DNR offices throughout the state.

Full implementation of the state wolf plan will require Federal delisting of wolves. The US Fish and Wild-

life Service will probably start the process later this year to either reclassify wolves as threatened or completely delist wolves from the Federal listing status. Re-classification will allow more flexible management in the state, but full management will not return to the state until federal delisting has occurred.

Send Comments to:

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