

Wisconsin Wolf Population Remains Similar to Last Year.

MADISON – Biologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently finalized the count of wolves for winter 2008, and estimated 537 to 564 wolves across the state. This number represents the minimum count on wolves in the population prior to the birth of pups in the spring, when the population probably doubles, before leveling back down in fall and winter. The winter count of wolves is used to gauge the status of the wolf population and set management goals.

The winter wolf count was completed using aerial tracking of radio collared wolves, snow track surveys by DNR and volunteer trackers, and collections of public reports on wolf observations. The Wisconsin DNR has conducted these annual counts of wolves since winter 1979-1980 when there were 25 wolves in the state.

The recent count of 537 or more wolves is very similar to the count in 2007 when 540 to 577 wolves occurred in the state, indicating the population remained about the same or declined slightly (about 1 %). In 2008 at 17-19 wolves were found on Indian reservations, and total count outside of Indian reservations was at least 520 wolves. The state management goal set in the 1999 Wisconsin Wolf Management plan <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/publications/wolfplan/toc.htm> was 350 wolves outside Indian reservation, thus the current population is 170 wolves above the management goal.

The slight decline in the 2008 wolf population may have been due to a few different factors. During summer 2007 pup production in packs across northern Wisconsin seemed down from previous years based on summer howl surveys. A new form of mange, Demodectic mange was detected in a Wisconsin wolf in the fall. At least 5 wolves died over winter with severe mange. And the wolf population may be reaching its carrying capacity in the state, having occupied most areas of suitable habitat.

A total of 143 wolf packs were detected in Wisconsin consisting of at least 2 adult wolves each. Twenty-three packs were distributed across central Wisconsin and 122 packs existed in northern Wisconsin. The largest packs in the state were the Beaver Dam Lake and Shanagolden Packs in Ashland County with 7-8 and 7-9 wolves respectively and the Wintergreen Pack in Price County with 8 wolves. At least 33 packs had 5 or more wolves in them.

Last year on March 12, 2007, wolves in Wisconsin and other portions of the western Great Lakes were removed from the list of federally endangered and threatened species. Thus management authority has returned to the states and tribes, allowing more flexible systems for dealing with problem wolves.

In 2007 wolves caused depredation to livestock on 30 farms. Trapping by USDA-Wildlife was conducted on most farms and 37 wolves and one wolf dog hybrid were trapped and euthanized from depredation sites. The DNR also issued shooting permits to 25 landowners with recent wolf problems in 2007, but no wolves were shot on these

permits. Three landowners did shoot wolves in the act of attacking pets or livestock on their property without permits. The shooting of wolves in the act of attacking pets or livestock by the landowners or renters of land is allowed on their property, with requirement that the local conservation warden be contacted within 24 hours.

In 2008 thus far wolves have killed livestock on 4 farms and 1 deer far, USDA-Wildlife Services have trapped and euthanized 6 wolves, and a landowner has shot one wolf. DNR and USDA-Wildlife Services have recently begun livetrapping for monitoring purposes. Normally 15 to 25 wolves are live-trapped and radio-collared in spring and summer, and monitored year-round by DNR pilots. At end of winter 2008, about 40 wolves were on the air that had been captured and radio collared in previous years..

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