



NEWS RELEASE

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921
Phone: 608/267-7404 TDD: 608/267-6897**

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**CONTACT: Randy Jurewicz 608-267-7507; Dave Weitz 715-839-3715;
Bob Manwell 608-264-9248**

**SUBJECT: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to reclassify,
delist wolves in much of United States**

MADISON, Wis. -- A proposal by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service would upgrade the gray wolf from federally endangered status to threatened in Wisconsin and Michigan. The move is expected to take up to one year to implement. It would provide added flexibility for the states in dealing with depredating wolves.

There now are an estimated 248 wolves in Wisconsin.

“In 1975, when wolves were found to have entered the state from Minnesota, an extensive recovery program was developed to protect them,” said Randy Jurewicz, endangered species biologist with the DNR in Madison. “Recovery of Wisconsin's wolf population has been based on protecting the species, its habitat and providing public education.”

Currently the gray wolf is listed as a threatened species under Wisconsin state law and an endangered species under federal law..

Regardless of the wolf's state status, as long as wolves are listed as federally endangered in Wisconsin, only nonlethal means can be used to control wolves that kill livestock or pets. Once downgraded to federally threatened status, DNR or U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services wildlife managers could use lethal controls on problem animals.

A Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan, endorsed last year by the state Natural Resources Board, calls for moving the wolf down from state threatened to a non-game protected status when the population reaches the level of 250 for one year in Wisconsin, outside of Native American reservations.

If the gray wolf continues its successful recovery and populations continue to remain stable or increase, it is expected that eventually federal wildlife managers would take steps to remove the wolf from their threatened list. Such a delisting would give all wolf management authority back to the states. Such action could not take place without an approved Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan. In October, 1999 the Natural Resources Board adopted such a management plan for the state.

While the step from federally endangered to threatened marks significant progress toward full state management of the gray wolf, it will still be sometime before citizens will be able use lethal controls on depredating wolves.

"Removing the wolf from the state endangered and threatened species list would mark a major wildlife success story for Wisconsin," said Jurewicz, "it would be similar to the success we have had with our efforts to restore the bald eagle, which was once endangered in Wisconsin but is no longer."

Wolves have increased at an average rate of 20 percent annually since 1985, when only 15 wolves occurred in Wisconsin. Population counts have been conducted annually since 1979 and are based on monitoring by aerial tracking of radio-collared wolves, snow track surveys by DNR staff, and surveys by members of the general public who volunteer to do carnivore track surveys.