



7 February 2012

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environment

Re: Testimony on SB411 from Adrian Treves, PhD, Associate Professor, UW-Madison

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee

I offer informational testimony only. I am an Associate Professor of Environmental Studies at University of Wisconsin–Madison. Sixteen years ago I earned a PhD from Harvard University in the topic of predator-prey ecology and have worked for the last 12 years on wolf management and public opinion of wolf policy in Wisconsin. I have authored 14 scientific papers on wolves and over 55 on predators and prey generally. I teach three classes on these topics to nearly 200 students annually. My team and I have surveyed more than 2,100 Wisconsin residents five times since 2001 about their preferences and opinion of wolf policy and management in our state. My team and I study hunting as a legitimate conservation strategy and methods for wolf depredation management and mitigation. I recently published a review of 101 research papers about the relationship between depredation and hunting of carnivores that revealed that the issue is not simply whether or not to hunt, it is how and where to hunt that are critical. On this basis, I offer the following recommendations about SB 411.

First I address Wisconsin's public opinion of wolf harvest. In all our surveys, the majority of state residents (both within and outside wolf range) indicate they would support a public regulated, hunting or trapping season on wolves on two conditions: it is *designed to reduce depredations without jeopardizing the wolf population*. The bill as written neither ensures sustainable, annual harvest nor targets depredations so I anticipate it will be viewed negatively by the majority of state residents. In short, although this bill claims to address depredations, the proposed rules for the hunt suggest that recreation and indiscriminate take are the goals.

More specifically, SB 411 contains elements that are NOT broadly acceptable to Wisconsin residents and ignores the special role of the gray wolf in our state. In our surveys, we found the following hunting rules generated twice as much opposition as support: hunting with dogs and hunting wolves by trapping. Over a quarter of our respondents opposed wolf-hunting by out-of-state hunters, and another quarter thought that only depredating wolves should be hunted.

I recommend the bill grant authority to the DNR to set hunting methods that more closely match the state citizens' preferences, namely that the hunt is designed to reduce depredation, but ensure a secure population of wolves.

Complete report available at

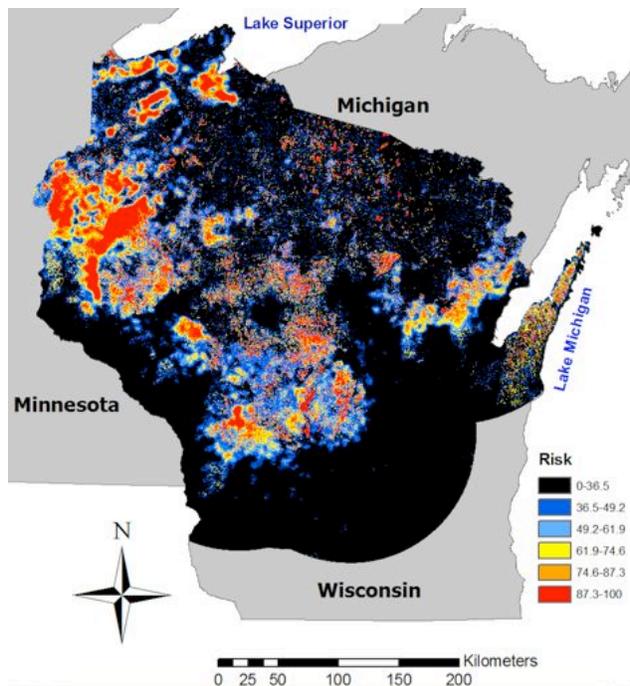
http://nelson.wisc.edu/people/treves/wolves/reports/2009_Survey_Results_Residents-of-Wolf-Range_smaller.pdf

In addition, continuing compensation for dogs killed by wolves on public land failed to win majority support in any of our surveys, even among our respondents who have lost the most from wolf depredations. That rule would also change the standards of compensation by the Wildlife Management Bureau of the DNR. I recommend amending the bill to eliminate this provision.

Regarding night-time hunting and the length of the proposed season. Both of these provisions of the bill treat wolves without the respect due to a trophy animal. The length of the season is similar to the season on rabbits, squirrels, and beavers but longer than coyotes. Similarly, the paragraphs relating to landowners killing wolves without a permit is simply wrong-headed. That provision could generate unsustainable mortality and lead the Fish and Wildlife Service to relist the wolf. Landowners already have options through permits from the DNR when they have wolf problems. Wolves are not an ordinary fur-bearer or vermin and should be accorded the status of grand trophy game to be hunted with respect or not at all. As a species fresh off the endangered species list and a species with very special meaning to many people including the sovereign tribal nations in our state, this bill should be amended to accord the wolf it's due place among Wisconsin's premier wildlife. I recommend the DNR be given the authority to determine a sustainable and publicly acceptable season length and methods of hunting.

Similarly, the bill as currently written ignores a great deal of science and public opinion relating to wolf depredation. Wolf depredations have been the greatest obstacle to public acceptance of the wolf in Wisconsin for the last 33 years. This bill does not adequately address depredations because it ignores how predictable these depredations are and how spatially localized they have been. We know where depredations on farm animals are most likely (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Estimated risk of wolf attack on livestock within 100 km of any Wisconsin wolf pack. The model was 91% correct in predicting wolf attacks from 2007–2011. Black areas represent the lowest risk category where livestock are predicted to be unaffected. Other colors represent even distributions of risk from blue (low risk) to red (highest-risk) where 43% of future wolf attacks on livestock fell in red areas (6.2% of the map). Risk was estimated from distance to the nearest wolf pack, distance to forest, and percent area under grass, hay, or pasture, excluding gray areas. See Treves, A., Martin, K.A., Wydeven A.P., Wiedenhoft, J.E. (2011) Forecasting Environmental Hazards and the Application of Risk Maps to Predator Attacks on Livestock. *Bioscience* 61:451-458. Complete report available at <http://nelson.wisc.edu/people/treves/wolves/wolfriskmap.php>



We have used spatial models to predict 91% of depredation sites before they arise. In other words better than 11 out of 12 wolf attacks on farm animals occur in less than one-third of our state. Yet this bill proposes allowing hunting in 100% of the state and legislates the zones used for hunting. I recommend you amend the bill to allow the DNR to designate as many hunting zones as precisely as will be sustainable and reduce depredations. In that way we could reduce the depredations on farm animals that are the primary source of resentment toward wolves and the DNR.

Many in the hunting community and DNR worry the Fish & Wildlife Service will relist the wolf is we misstep. This bill increases the risk of relisting the wolf. It increases that risk because it proposes untested methods in a very long season in too broad an area of the state. Wisconsin scientists are still debating the amount of illegal killing of wolves and how this might change with a legal wolf-hunt. The answer will help to determine the sustainable annual quota of wolves that might be huntable. I recommend the committee amend the bill to allow one or more years delay in the wolf-hunt until this issue is resolved scientifically. Haste makes waste. We risk wasting the opportunity for Wisconsin to manage its own wolves without federal intervention.

In conclusion I want to address the possible consequences of ignoring majority public opinion. This bill seems to reflect a vocal minority. In so doing it will unify opponents who otherwise have not collaborated. I will venture two predictions. Opponents will challenge the bill at the ballot, in the ceded territories, and in the courts. You have never seen wolf policy challenged in these ways, particularly in state courts. Litigants will invoke the Public Trust Doctrine with its precedents in the U.S. Supreme Court that guarantee wildlife are a public trust resource that cannot be jeopardized. This bill will unify the opposition and this bill does not do justice to the measured and prudent approach to wolf policy the great state of Wisconsin has taken up to this point.

Thank you



Adrian Treves, PhD
Associate Professor
Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies
University of Wisconsin-Madison
30A Science Hall, 550 North Park St. Madison, WI 53706
atreves@wisc.edu
Director of the Carnivore Coexistence Lab www.nelson.wisc.edu/people/treves/
Tel: 608-890-1450