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I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to testify on the proposed wolf season structure and quota levels. My name is Lee Fahrney and I am the Secretary of the Conservation Congress and will be chairing the WCC Wolf Study Committee this year.

The Conservation Congress has long had a position supporting the return of management of the gray wolf to the state and the implementation of a harvest season when the population was sufficient to sustain such. It is a testament to the work of the many conservation partners of this state, the NRB, and the Department that this day has arrived and we are here to talk about a species that has gone from extirpation in Wisconsin to a robust and healthy population that is above and beyond the management goals for the state. The WCC recognizes that this is a highly charged issue and evokes many strong feelings from persons with wide ranging viewpoints. Regardless of which side you may be approaching this issue, I think we can all agree the gray wolf is indeed a conservation success story.

The Conservation Congress is highly supportive of the 2012 wolf hunting and trapping season. The WCC Wolf Committee approved the Department's proposed season structure, zones, and implementation plan that was presented to them on June 9th however, the committee is concerned that the proposed harvestable quota is too conservative and would like to see the quota set at 300 animals, exclusive of tribal harvest and depredation permits. The Congress feels that a slightly more liberal harvest quota would allow for more hunting and trapping opportunities and contribute to a more substantial management effort toward the overall population goal of 350 wolves, without jeopardizing the viability of the wolf population that is well over two times the management goals for the species.

The WCC supports the Wolf Management Plan's goal of 350 wolves and considers that number to be the upper limit of the social carrying capacity of this species. And biologically, we believe that wolf populations beyond that target figure are having a negative impact on other wildlife populations and their ecosystems. As the wolf population increases, the wolves are expanding into areas of the state that have marginal habitat for them and areas that are not conducive to having wolves given the significant potential for human interaction.

The Congress is cognizant that this first year will be a trial year, and we appreciate the need to move forward cautiously. The information gained following this year's harvest season will be invaluable for setting the parameters in future years. Once again, we'd like to thank the NRB, the Department, and our conservation partners of Wisconsin for their work on this conservation success story, and we look forward to continuing this work and writing the next chapter of this story with you.

As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.