

# SHARING THE LAND WITH WOLVES

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Wolves generally are shy of people and avoid contact with them. Any wild animal, however, can be dangerous if it is cornered, injured or sick, or has become habituated to people through activities such as feeding. In the case of large predators, like wolves and bears, it is particularly important for people to avoid actions that encourage these animals to spend time near people, or become dependent on them for food.

Below are guidelines that you can follow to decrease the chance of wolf habituation and conflict while living in and visiting wolf country. Many of these suggestions will also reduce conflicts with other large predators, such as bears.

## LIVING & WORKING IN WOLF COUNTRY

Wolves occasionally come close to human dwellings or worksites, often in search of prey. Normally they move on without causing problems, however, in some instances they can become habituated to humans, and can become a nuisance or a threat. Habituated, or bold wolves, usually have to be removed from the population to avoid further conflict. Use the following guidelines to prevent habituation of wolves near homes or worksites.

- Never intentionally feed wolves
- Avoid any practices that acclimate wolves to people. Disposal of household refuse, especially meat scraps, may attract wolves. Wolves may become dependent on this food source and become accustomed to the presence of humans as a result. Dispose of food scraps and garbage in cans with secure lids
  - Wolves can be attracted to food discarded by loggers and others working outdoors and can become habituated to receiving food from humans at outdoor work sites. Never intentionally leave food out at your worksite. Pack all food scraps and garbage out.
  - Feeding deer or other prey animals can attract predators such as wolves. Discontinue feeding until wolves move out of the area. Hang suet feeders at least 7 feet above the surface of the ground or snow.
  - Installing motion sensor lights may help keep wolves away from dwellings.
- Always remain aware of wolf sign near your home or work area. Report consistent and close wolf sign, or incidents of bold wolves to Wisconsin DNR (715-762-1363).

## PETS IN WOLF COUNTRY

To protect both pets and wildlife, pets should always be monitored by their owners in areas where they may encounter wildlife. Unsupervised dogs that stray from their owner's homes or from their handlers into wolf territories can be at risk. Wolves may treat dogs as interlopers on their territories and attack and kill or injure them, especially if the wolves have pups nearby. Occasionally wolves do attack pets near owner's residence.

- Do not leave pet food outdoors where it may be accessible to a wolf or other predators. Wolves quickly become acclimated to a consistent food source such as this and may eventually injure or kill pets.

- If wolves have been sighted near your home, confine pets in pens or indoors until wolves are no longer present. Secure other domestic animals such as rabbits and chickens when wolves are in the area.
- If you are hiking or walking with your dog, do not let it wander out of your sight or voice control. Consider keeping it leashed.
- If you are visiting in wolf country, don't leave your dog unattended or chained outside at a cabin or campsite.
- If you believe your pet has been injured or killed by a wolf, contact USDA-Wildlife Services (north 1-800-228-1368, south 1-800-433-0663) as soon as possible and preserve evidence such as tracks. Wisconsin DNR reimburses for verified wolf depredation of dogs.

## RAISING LIVESTOCK IN WOLF COUNTRY

A general brochure on wolf depredation on livestock can be found on the WDNR website:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/wolf/documents/WolvesinFarmCountry2012.pdf>

## HUNTING IN WOLF COUNTRY

Some hunters may unknowingly place themselves in compromising situations while pursuing their sports. Deer archery hunters and turkey hunters who use camouflage to conceal themselves and the scents or calls of animals that are also prey for wolves, may find themselves in close proximity to wolves. In recent years several bow hunters and turkey hunters have had close encounters with wolves. None of these hunters was harmed, and all reported that once the wolf or wolves were aware of their presence (made difficult by the camouflage and deer scent), they quickly retreated, leaving the hunter awed and a little unnerved by the experience. Trappers occasionally catch wolves in their traps, and predator hunters may call wolves in with predator calls. Hunters should follow these common sense guidelines:

- Do not cover yourself with deer scent. Wolves use their nose to locate prey, and deer scent may attract a wolf and lead to an uncomfortable situation.
- Turkey hunters and predator hunters should be aware that their calls may attract a wolf or wolf pack in for a closer inspection, and closer still if a decoy is used.
  - Should a wolf approach uncomfortably close, make your presence known by standing, shouting, and if the need arises, throwing rocks or sticks.
- Have telephone numbers of local wildlife officials handy if you are trapping and capture a wolf in a trap set for another species. State natural resource personnel can assist in removing a wolf from a trap.
- Do not concentrate cleaning of wild game and fish in heavily used areas such as campgrounds and hunting access areas. Always dispose of wild animal remains properly.
- Be sure that you can identify the difference between a small wolf and a large coyote.
- Report an accidental shooting, or poaching of a wolf, to WDNR at (800) 847-9367

The wolf's main prey in the Western Great Lakes is whitetail deer, but the impact of wolves on the deer population is not significant. Today the region has more deer and wolves than at any time in the past 50 years! The most significant drain on whitetail

populations in the region is hunting harvest, car/deer crashes, and winter malnutrition. The presence of wolves can have an effect on the activity of deer. Any practices that concentrate the wolves' major prey also may concentrate wolves.

## HUNTING DOGS & WOLVES

Wolves are accustomed to defending their territory from other wild canid intruders, such as wolves from neighboring packs and coyotes. Because of this instinct to defend their territory, wolves sometimes attack hunting dogs. Free ranging hunting dogs such as hounds are at the greatest risk because they normally roam some distance from their owners. The following are suggestions for avoiding conflicts between wolves and hunting dogs:

- Avoid areas that have recent history of wolf-dog conflicts or wolf activity. Contact your natural resources wildlife officials or the DNR website to find out areas to avoid, or sign up for the DNR email notification system to be alerted of wolf attacks on dogs, [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WIDNR/subscriber/new?pop=t&topic\\_id=WIDNR\\_407](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WIDNR/subscriber/new?pop=t&topic_id=WIDNR_407)
- Avoid releasing dogs in areas with abundant wolf sign. If fresh wolf scat and tracks are present, hunt the area another time.
- Make noise while hunting with dogs to alert wolves that humans are nearby.
- Do not release bear dogs on baits that have been recently used by wolves.
- Recover all hunting hounds released during a chase on the same day.
- Have dogs under immediate control and/or be aware of their locations.
- Begin recovery of your hunting dogs well in advance of dusk.
- Do not allow dogs to scavenge deer remains. Wolves often scavenge deer remains and "claim" this important food source.
- Remember, wolves are protected by state laws. Killing or injuring a wolf is unlawful.
- Information on wolves and hunting dogs in Wisconsin is available on the WDNR website, <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/wolf/guidance.html>
- If you believe your dog has been injured or killed by a wolf, contact USDA-Wildlife Services (north 1-800-228-1368, south 1-800-433-0663) as soon as possible and preserve evidence such as tracks. Wisconsin DNR reimburses for verified wolf depredation of dogs up to \$2500.

## CAMPING IN WOLF COUNTRY

As the population of wolves continues to rise in the Western Great Lakes, casual users of wild lands are more likely to encounter wolves. Even so, sighting a wolf is likely to be a rare experience. During the past 200 years, there have been very few cases of wild wolves attacking people. Recent cases in Ontario resulting in injuries to campers serve as a reminder that people active within wolf range should respect wolves and realize that while this species has an excellent "safety record", they are very capable predators.

Please keep in mind:

- Sighting a wolf at close range in the wild is a very rare occurrence. Do not be alarmed if it happens. The wolf will most likely slip away at the first opportunity.
- Know wolf sign, self educate yourself about wolves prior to hiking in wolf country.
  - Cook, wash dishes and store food away from sleeping areas.
  - Pack out or dispose of garbage and leftover food properly.

- Suspend or pack food, toiletries and garbage out of reach of any wildlife.
- Keep pets near you at all times.

## Distinguishing between Wolves, Coyotes, and Dogs

Size is a key difference between coyotes and wolves. Coyotes range from 3.5 to 4.5 feet long, 20-22 inches high at the shoulder and 20 to 50 pounds. This is about half the size of a wolf. Coyotes tend to have gray or reddish brown fur with rusty colored legs, feet, and ears, and whitish fur on the throat and belly. Their ears are pointed and relatively long, and the muzzle is pointed and petite. Coyotes tend to carry their tail held below the back line. The tail may or may not be black tipped and is less than 18 inches long. In contrast, wolves have many color variations but tend to be buff-colored tans grizzled with gray and black (although they can also be black or white). Their ears are rounded and relatively short, and the muzzle is large and blocky. Wolves generally hold their tail straight out from the body or down. Wolves stand 28-32 inches at the shoulder and weigh 50 to 100 pounds. The tail is black tipped and over 18 inches long. Although the tails of many dogs are curled; coyote and wolf tails are never seen curled.

**Scat** - Wolf droppings, or scat, are generally 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter with tapered ends. Coyote scat is typically less than 1 inch in diameter. Wolf scat usually contains deer or elk hair, as well as shards of bones. Wolf “meat scats,” deposited after a fresh kill, are loose, black, tar-like and pungent.

**Tracks** - Coyote track size is about 2.5 inches long and 2.0 inches wide. A wolf track is about 4.0 inches long and 3.5 inches wide. Dog tracks vary, with some being as large as, or larger than, wolf tracks. Wolves and other wild canids usually place their hind foot in the track left by the front foot, whereas a dog's front and hind foot tracks usually do not overlap each other. Wolves usually travel in a more “business like” straight line, while dogs meander back and forth. The distance between one set of wolf tracks and the next is usually greater than 26 inches and often more than 30. Wolves typically have narrow chests, and their tracks appear almost in a straight line. A pack of wolves traveling together in snow often walk directly in each others tracks so that there appears to be only one animal.

## WOLF ENCOUNTER ETIQUETTE

If you want to view wildlife, do it on their terms. Watch from a respectful distance; use binoculars or a spotting scope. Learn about wildlife behavior. Your actions should not in any way change an animal's natural behavior. Use self-restraint so that wildlife can continue to live freely.

- Do not approach wolves while on foot or in/on a vehicle.
- Do not allow a wolf to approach any closer than 300 feet.
- Do not entice them to come closer with food or by howling.
- Leave room for the wolf to escape your presence.
- When photographing wolves, do not use bait at blind sights.
- Do not leave your vehicle to pursue a wolf.

## AGGRESSIVE, FEARLESS, OR BOLD WOLVES

Wolves are shy animals, but are also very curious by nature. It is not unusual for a wolf to “stand its ground” when it sees a human. This is not a show of aggression, but rather curiosity. There are many stories of wolves actually approaching humans, but rarely with aggression. Attacks by wolves on humans are rare, but not unheard of. If a wolf acts aggressively (growls or snarls) or fearlessly (approaches humans at a close distance without fear) take the following actions:

- Do not run – predators instinctively chase running animals.
- Raise your arms and wave them in the air to make yourself look larger.
- Back away slowly; do not turn your back on the wolf.
- Make noise and throw objects at the wolf.

Report wolf conflicts immediately to Wisconsin DNR 1-715-762-1363 or USDA Wildlife Services 1-800-228-1368 in Northern WI or 1-800-433-0663 in Southern WI.