

# **WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

1/21/2014 Wausau Howard Johnson Hotel

**Introductions** - Bill Vander Zouwen provided a summary of topics on the agenda for discussion. Bill announced that he will attend next month's meeting but has since taken a new position and will be moving on from the DNR and the Wolf Advisory Committee. Bill provided a couple options for choosing another Committee facilitator. The focus groups provided useful information regarding the public survey and it will be sent out as a pilot survey in the next week; additional edits to the survey may still occur. A summary of Committee discussion rules were provided. The Committee will work today to develop guidelines and metrics regarding depredation and livestock.

**Wolf Management Draft Plan Discussion - Topics discussed today are related to the development of a new wolf management plan.**

**Local Livestock Depredation** - Discussion directed by Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

## Local Livestock Depredation

- An education component is essential.
- The Committee should consider a "hotspot" program such as done with deer depredation management. Wolf depredation is timelier to address and with "hotspot" management we may better address issues.
- Caution regarding limiting the duration of in which depredation controls may be used during each situation should be considered. Important clarification - the USDA Wildlife Services can trap for 2-3 weeks following any wolf activity.
- Include sections on: 1) livestock, 2) education of non-lethal options, and 3) and Best Management Practices (BMPs) for controlling wolf depredation. The effectiveness of BMPs are often misunderstood by non-agricultural producers and should be outlined specifically.
- Considerations for hobby farms in prime wolf areas - threshold for farm size/location, a grandfather-clause for preexisting hobby farms, a distinction between producers and hobby farms, landowner's rights, farms with chronic depredation issues, hobby farms with total losses (i.e., only two sheep and both are depredated), nonlethal controls and their increased use in the future, the responsibility of landowners establishing hobby farms in prime wolf territory and the responsibilities of the state, level of depredation control response (individual situations are complex), and compensation.
- Regulated hunting/trapping could be used as a proactive control but is not an effective reactive control. The number one function of depredation control is solving landowner problems, not providing recreational opportunities.
- Inform public that agencies respond to all reported depredations - develop/enhance public comfort.
- The Committee should discuss year-round depredation trapping on private lands.
- Design a program that 1) lets local managers make informed decisions, 2) provides local managers with all available management tools, 3) makes the public comfortable with responses,

4) uses both nonlethal and lethal methods, 5) establishes shooting permit criteria, and 6) continues and expands educational programs.

- Do not create niches where some management tools are used and others are not.
- On private lands, landowners are not allowed to trap wolves on private lands because of incidental bear captures. Currently, landowners may trap coyotes year-round on private lands and many use the same trap setups for wolves as they do coyotes. This is currently a statutory issue although additional discussions regarding limitations on trap size/type could occur.
- The Committee agrees that translocation of depredated wolves is not a viable long-term option.
- Add “verified harassment” to the criteria for defining depredations occurring in previous few years, not just “verified depredation”. There is no current established definition of harassment (i.e., tracks or other evidence that exist when cattle are run around or through a fence). Probably need to develop a tightened definition to minimize abuse of shooting permit program. Can leave up to the professional judgment of USDA-Wildlife Services staff (i.e., 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification).
- Committee should discuss definitions for “proactive control”. Landowners currently receive “reactive controls”. Proactive controls are those that occur after reactive controls are used.

#### USDA APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS)

- The current Committee sentiment regarding USDA-WS (expressed by several Committee members): USDA-WS is doing a good job with implementing their depredation control program; they are effective, and they put in the necessary time for trapping.
- USDA-WS currently is charged with the confirmation of wolf depredations - maintains an impartiality between the DNR and livestock producers/owners.
- It is important to note that the full slate of depredation control tools was only first available in 2012 and we are currently in a transition period. Confidence in the program should grow with continued use. The consensus of the Committee is that USDA-WS is doing a very good job in responding to depredation. Continued and increased public education is essential.
- What additional tools does USDA-WS need in their toolbox? The answer is in the data; now that they have the full range of tools, depredations are decreasing and expected to do so in the future.
- The plan/department should make a public statement that they will continue to fund/work with APHIS in the future. The Committee recommends seeking additional funding sources.
- USDA-WS tries to utilize wolf carcasses harvested under depredation controls; provided to DNR for research, tribes for ceremonial purposes, or trapper’s association for education.
- Depredation is considerably down in 2013 compared with 2012 because of increased removals in historical livestock areas and the liberalization of shooting permits.

#### Certified Citizen Trappers (CCT)

- Constraints - they are spread out throughout the landscape, there are a finite number of USDA-WS trappers, many CCTs may not travel long distances due to financial costs, establish accountability for incidental captures (eagles, bears, etc.; will these be handled properly by CCTs or will agency personnel need to respond), and record keeping accountability (USDA-WS has >2 decades of experience).
- Current USDA-WS demand for depredation control trapping is at the highest level and they are able to meet those demands. Demand will likely decrease in the future as depredations are

reduced, freeing up USDA-WS resources. The creation of a CCT program could be controversial as it would likely involve a CCT certification process and if the USDA-WS is able to handle the work load, CCTs may not be utilized despite completing the certification process. The USDA-WS would not want to assign workloads to CCTs as it would probably be done minimally. As wolves are delisted, USDA-WS has the full toolbox of management controls and the general consensus among the committee is that it is working. It will take time to build public confidence in depredation control as 2 years of USDA-WS work is relatively small compared with 13 years of limited or no controls.

- Currently, landowners may receive depredation tags in WI and list two trappers to fill them although are limited to specific times of year (avoid incidental bear captures, etc.). This is not a regulated CCT program.
- Implications of CCTs who lack the skills to effectively trap wolves? Must ensure that CCTs do not shortcut trapping activities as incorrect placement may educate wolves to trapping. MN has criteria to ensure CCTs are skilled (i.e., >7 years of previous trapping experience). Lots of traps are placed each fall so perhaps education of wolves to traps is not a necessary consideration.
- May cause conflicts between landowners and CCTs if additional depredations occur while CCTs are trapping.
- In MN, CCTs do not keep wolves and receive \$150 per wolf (minimal reimbursement considering financial and time investment involved with setting/checking traps). Compensation may be viewed as a bounty and could cause public perception problems. Consider allowing CCTs to keep wolves as compensation.
- Under current emergency rule, landowners must allow public access for trapping/hunting if they receive compensations for depredation or shooting permits (this is not a USDA-WS issue).
- Discussed potential for lifting restrictions on tools to encourage landowners to participate in agency depredation controls.
- Rather than create a CCT program which requires funding and administrative rule, provide a list of CCTs and their trapping restrictions to landowners; may limit bureaucracy. The Department could play a facilitator role in placing landowners and trappers into contact.
- The most important aspect of depredation control is that landowners have a problem and need a solution. A CCT program is not about providing hunting/trapping opportunities. Mandatory submission of wolf carcasses/pelts to state may limit abuse of program (trappers who try to convince landowners to wait until late fall when pelts are prime).
- Potential program involving landowner choices; landowners could 1) receive a harvest permit, choose a CCTs from a list, and would not have to allow public hunting/trapping, 2) use depredation controls through USDA-WS, or 3) receive shooting permits and allow public hunting/trapping on their lands.
- Recommended that landowners be required to only allow 1 trapper per farm rather than 1 trapper per 40 acres. For depredation permits landowners are required to allow 2 trappers regardless of acreage. During the hunting season, landowners are required to allow 1 hunter per 40 acres. There should be some consistency with other programs in the regulations for simplicity.
- **A Committee Vote regarding CCTs was held - the majority of the Committee was in favor of the following CCT program; one Committee member was opposed:**
  - **ASPECTS OF CCT PROGRAM** - Develop a certified trapping program, the DNR would maintain an informal list of certified trappers, trappers must complete a mandatory

training (current wolf trapper education course or equivalent), incorporate BMPs, trappers will receive no compensation, landowners cannot charge certified trappers a fee to participate, mandatory wolf harvest reporting and registration, the DNR will collect all wolf carcasses and pelts, USDA-WS will continue to confirm all wolf depredation to maintain impartiality, and landowners may choose to use USDA-WS or certified trappers - under current policy landowners must have a shooting permit to participate (so they are currently required to allow public hunting/trapping; the Committee will discuss this requirement further).

### Education

- The plan should highlight that depredation is a public education, response, and avoidance issue.
- Timely reporting of issues by public is important although must consider privacy issues.
- The plan should include: 1) timely reporting of issues, 2) information on how landowners may access help, 3) funding, 4) information regarding wolf impacts on livestock, 5) information on depredation events, 6) APHIS USDA-WS contact information, 7) abatement techniques, 8) BMP information for general public as well as how farm production works, 9) education for people who don't live in wolf range, and 10) funding for depredation responses.
- Include information on baiting and feeding (may create situations in which landowners increase the likelihood for bear/wolf conflicts close to residences/properties; i.e., if you bring some wild into your property, you risk bringing in other aspects of wild as well).

### Funding

- Committee consensus for continued funding of APHIS USDA-WS depredation management. Must also seek additional revenues (federal grants, etc.).
- If hunter/trapper license fees are used to fund depredation management, there may be a need to incorporate a hunting/trapping component in the depredation plan. Efficiency in responding to landowner's needs is most important; do not want to minimize response times by attempting to facilitate recreational activities.

### Tribal Lands

- GLIFWC is an off-reservation organization. The opportunity to investigate depredation by USDA-WS has been provided although not always used. Depredation controls have been supported by tribes in certain situations. Tribes are consulted in the decision-making process and in general, the program has worked well and has been well received.
- The general Committee consensus is to continue current tribal policies in new plan.

### Proactive Management Controls

- **THIS SECTION PERTAINS ONLY TO LIVESTOCK DEPREDAATION, NOT PET OR HUNTING HOUND DEPREDAATION. THESE TOPICS WILL BE ADDRESSED AT A FUTURE WAC MEETING AND WILL HAVE A SEPARATE SECTION IN THE WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN.**

- Currently, proactive management used on farms with chronic depredation or areas with 2 confirmed depredations in a year. Management areas delineated based on a defined buffer, wolf home range, or easily recognizable landmarks such as roads or rivers.
- Considerations: 1) Central Forest region has low depredation rates although exists within an agricultural matrix, 2) discussion on proactive controls should come after all other depredation management topics in the plan, 3) whether areas identified for proactive control will be managed through USDA-WS management or through the issuance of additional harvest permits, and 4) nonlethal proactive controls.
- The Committee does not need to delineate specific areas for proactive controls but must decide whether to include their use in the plan.
- There are enforcement issues with offering tags specific for “hotspot” areas. Permission of use is necessary for implementation on private and federal lands; federal lands are not equivalent to state or county lands.
- DNR and USDA-WS depredation management experts on the Committee do not believe that proactive controls provide any additional benefits over the current depredation management program. Proactive management activities may not be targeted at specific farms having issues and there is a cost-benefit aspect which may or may not be favorable.
- Hunting and trapping could be used to focus harvest in areas instead of proactive measures although having the tools available could be important in the future. Proactive control may exist through the harvest zone system - harvest established as a percent of the population; WY has a fairly complex management zone system. Most livestock depredation occurs during the calving season or rendezvous season. Proactive controls must be initiated prior to depredations occurring, rather than in the fall; because of the biology of the species, dispersal, etc., focusing proactive controls through regulated fall harvest may be less effective than removing animals in the spring, although the breaking up of packs in the winter may also be effective.
- Caution necessary when considering the use of proactive controls in areas where wolves are killing hunting hounds in the act of hunting, particularly in prime wolf range.
- Proactive controls may be viewed negatively by the public. We can issue 50 permits in a proactive zone but if we target the 5 wolves (for example) causing depredation in an area using reactive measures, we will be more effective at targeting depredation management.
- Landscape-level criteria would be necessary, i.e., anyone with livestock in a proactive control area could qualify for a permit (but USDA-WS would only work in areas where depredation was considered chronic).
- The general consensus of the Committee is that proactive management is not needed to control livestock depredation as current harvest zones essentially set proactive management. Their inclusion in the plan is confusing considering the range of depredation management tools already available.
- **The use of proactive control areas for conflict mitigation was voted on and rejected by the committee**
- **There does seem to be support for retaining a Zone 1A in the Clay Plains of NW WI where more focused hunting and trapping could be directed, but would be discussed further under zone management system.**

#### Compensation

- The continued use of the current program is recommended recognizing that livestock producers are not being fully compensated for losses. The process for determining compensation pricing is adequate although should be determined in a fashion that is not based on market projections but rather actual livestock prices from the year of depredation.
- A December, 31<sup>st</sup> deadline for filing calve depredation claims should be included.

#### Regional Livestock Depredation

- Regulated harvest should be used to control wolf depredation or to limit wolves in areas of the state where their population establishment is not encouraged.
- The size and delineation of harvest zones will be discussed at future meetings as depredation is only one component for delineating boundaries.
- The Committee discussed Mladenoff's wolf habitat suitability model and the probability of areas being suitable habitat or not suitable habitat. The model identifies areas where wolves are likely to exist but does not make a value judgment on whether they should or should not be there. A study on where any species is located is not an indication of where they may eventually expand to. Mladenoff's 2009 model identified areas where wolves are likely to occur based on empirical data and showed that areas in the 1990s model were misidentified as unsuitable.
- Current management at the local level has been effective at targeting depredation controls but management at the regional level is likely ineffective. However, setting quotas at a higher proportion of the population in areas such as southern WI can be a regional management tool.

#### Monitoring Livestock Impacts

- Need to determine the number of hunters using the hunter access program and how many wolves were harvested by these people. – include in future registration or questionnaire data collection
- Landowners receiving depredation compensation or shooting permits are required to allow public hunting. More than half of farms receiving compensation did not utilize USDA-WS management actions; 48 wolves removed by USDA-WS, 17 by landowners, 16 by permit, and 1 in the act of depredation.

#### Summary of issues voted on by the committee:

Proactive control/Hot spot – allow for proactive control within larger zones to allow for more control in conflict areas. Use methods which will allow for pack removal – not hunting, targeted trapping. Hunting could be a component in certain situations.

\*\*Voted on and rejected

Shooting permit criteria - verified depredation or harassment as determined by APHIS in last 2 years, human health and safety, verified depredation in current year or live within a mile of a verified depredation and have livestock

\*\*voted on and approved

We will no longer use translocation to address conflicts

\*\*voted on and approved

Statement that the DNR will continue to fund APHIS work

\*\*Voted on and approved

Diversify funding sources – need to find alternative funding sources if license fees are insufficient to cover depredation payments, APHIS contract work and other management activities. In recognition current funds will not be sufficient to cover expenses, and the general public has an interest in wolf management we will seek additional grants and other sources of funding.

\*\*Voted on and approved

Proactive controls – identify areas where there is a history of conflict, allow proactive control to reduce the population in that area, define a zone to encompass pack area, chronic situations (2 or more in past 5 years), livestock, minimum size, anyone with livestock in the area would qualify for a permit, WS removal on public lands within the area, certified trappers on permitted properties, issue more hunting and trapping permits.

\*\*Voted on and rejected

Certified trapping program informal list held by DNR of certified trappers – mandatory training (current wolf trapper education course or equivalent future program), techniques, no compensation by the state, year round response to problems, mandatory reporting/registration, APHIS responsible for the initial verification, landowner choice, landowner can't receive any compensation for providing access, landowner must have permit from DNR, Make similar to deer act 82 on access.

\*\*Voted on and approved

Livestock depredation controls in and around tribal reservations. GLIFWC is an off reservation entity, no tribe is present to represent on reservation issues. Offer for con-investigation within a 6 mile buffer of larger reservations in the state. Plan recommendations only apply to off reservation lands. Continue current policies.

\*\*Voted on and approved

Compensation – include statement that “payments do not fully cover depredation losses or other types of wolf damage”, current verification, valuation setting, set valuations at end of year rather than beginning, December 31 deadline on missing calf payments/claims, lethal or non-lethal depredation enrollment would require access (APHIS action or compensation) if agency resources are not brought to bear no access is required (permit holder, certified trapper etc.), landowner can decline public access if APHIS is actively working on the property

\*\*Voted on and approved

Additional Comments

- Currently, there are contracted persons or volunteers in each winter wolf tracking unit. Tracking has been difficult this year as there have been either prolonged periods of no snow fall or daily snowfall, and extremely cold temperatures which hamper participation. The addition of the contracted trainers should allow for a reliable minimum winter count this season. Two additional tracking blocks were added this year in Columbia and Marquette counties.
- Discussion occurred regarding the population goal of 350 and whether this goal should continue to be used in regards to population metrics.
- Data from the general public survey are still being compiled. Wolf age data (teeth) are still be collected and once completed, will be sent out to the laboratory with results expected prior to quota setting in the spring.
- The WAC will make recommendations to the NRB regarding permanent rule regarding the harvest season structure. The WAC will need to discuss these topics this year for implementing changes for the 2015 season; the 2014 season is still established under the emergency rule regulations. The Committee may recommend changes to the harvest season although it is a legislative issue and requires statutory changes.

**Next Meeting:** The next WAC meeting will be on Wednesday, February 12, 2014.

**March Meeting:** The March WAC meeting will be on Wednesday, March 26, 2014.