

## Wolf Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

Wausau

23 April 2013

**Members Present:** All the members or their alternates were in attendance except Sarah Kehrli, Jenny Pelej and the USFS representative.

**Approach to Meeting Notes:** Our notes will include enough detail to capture what was presented and discussed, but without replication of presentations and handouts. Notes will capture concepts, desires and concerns but not record quotes or the names of people that they came from.

**Meeting Purpose:** This was the first meeting of the new Wolf Advisory Committee. The meeting was mostly about getting members prepared to make quota and license number recommendations at our May 23 meeting. We spent most of the time collectively getting up to speed on wolf monitoring and management. Speakers included Bill Vander Zouwen (advisory committee protocol; timetable; 2012 quota background; wolf season report), David Zebro (law enforcement activity), Dave MacFarland and Adrian Wydeven (wolf monitoring and management history; counts; mortalities), Jason Suckow (depredation control activities), Brad Koele (depredation compensation), Peter David (tribal perspectives), Brian Dhuey (hunter and trapper survey), and Jen Stenglein (population model).

**Wolf Advisory Committee Protocol:** The wolf advisory committee is advisory to the DNR Wildlife Policy Team. It will develop recommendations for their consideration. The secretary's office will make final recommendations to the Natural Resources Board, who approve plans and quotas. The advisory committee strives to integrate field and central office staff, various DNR bureaus, tribal perspectives, partner perspectives, and stakeholder perspectives, as in the past.

**Timetable:** The Wolf Advisory Committee will develop quota and license number recommendations at its May 23 meeting. The department will make final recommendations to the Natural Resources Board in early June. The Board will act on quota and license recommendations in June. The Voigt Task Force will make a declaration in July. August 1 is the application deadline for state hunters and trappers. Wolf Plan revision will begin in June with the goal of Natural Resource Board approval in June 2014. Wolf permanent rule promulgation will proceed over the next winter with official hearings and Board action in June 2014, if all goes as planned.

**Wolf Monitoring:** Wolf monitoring has involved radio-telemetry, observations from aircraft, observations from the public, and track surveys by staff and volunteers. These counts primarily map and count wolves in territorial packs, but detected lone wolves are also tallied. The wolf plan goal of 350 is based on minimum counts.

**2012 Quota Background:** An ad hoc group worked diligently to develop emergency rules and quota/license recommendations between April and July. This work included numerous committee meetings, tribal consultation, public meetings, stakeholder group meetings, web surveys, a review of the science on impacts of human take, a review of wolf mortality rate information, a prediction of depredation control kills, and modeling of quota alternatives by UW-Madison that considered these things. Scientific literature suggested that a human take of near 30% would be required to reduce a wolf population. The ad hoc group made revisions to its recommendations based on public and staff and tribal input and ended up with a recommendation of a quota of 129 and a license number equal to 10 times the state hunter and trapper quota. The department made a final recommendation to the board of a quota of 201, which was within the range of quotas taken out to public meetings and which was more likely to begin to reduce the population based on modeling results. Expected depredation control kills and illegal kills were considered in setting the quota, but the quota was established for licensed hunter and trapper take during the season. The quota for state hunters and trappers was reduced to 116 following the declaration by the Ojibwe tribes. The applicant drawing selected 1160 people for authority to buy a license.

**2012 Wolf Season:** Hunter and trapper compliance was very good. If there is one thing to work on this next year, it's communication of the need to take the trapper certification course if one wants to trap

wolves. Quotas were reached in all zones between November 16 and December 23, with 117 being legally harvested and reported. Wolves were harvested in 30 counties. Data was collected on many variables including location of kill, age, sex, reproductive status, and age (teeth sent to lab for aging). Aging data is not yet available, but we've asked for expedited analysis. A wolf season report was distributed to committee members and is available on the DNR website.

**2012 Wolf Depredation Control:** USDA Wildlife Services worked with many landowners to address recent and ongoing depredation problems through lethal and non-lethal means. USDA removed 57 wolves on these farms. Permits were issued to 129 landowners to allow for their removal of wolves, resulting in 16 wolves removed. Landowners killed an additional 3 wolves in the act of depredation.

**2012 Wolf Claims:** Claim payments were made to 34 landowners and 6 hunters, totaling approximately \$139,000 for livestock and dog depredations. The wolf application and license revenue of near \$290,000 will first go to pay claims and then be available for other wolf management costs such as the depredation control contract with . There will be a hunting and trapping access requirement in 2013 for any land enrolled in the wolf damage program. There will also be a compensation limit for 5 missing calves per verified calf depredation beginning in 2013.

**Estimated Wolf Program Costs:** Current costs are \$140,000 for claims payment, \$156,000 for the USDA WS contract, and \$250,000 for wolf monitoring and management. Claim costs may be reduced in the future with continued aggressive control of depredation situations and reduced wolf populations.

**Wolf Mortalities:** Known wolf mortalities fell within the range expected when 2012 wolf quotas were set. They included: 117 taken by hunters and trappers, 76 taken in depredation control actions, 24 vehicle collisions, 21 illegal kills, and 5 of unknown cause.

**2013 Wolf Count:** The number of wolves in the 2013 minimum count were 809-834 in 215 packs and 15 loners compared to 815-880 in 213 packs and 20 loners in 2012. A comparison of the mid-points in these ranges suggests a 3% reduction. Although some volunteer trackers dropped out this year, gaps were filled by staff, contracted people, and retired wildlife staff. Observations were solicited from conservation congress delegates, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation board members, and DNR staff from Forestry and Law Enforcement. Some shared concerns about how close the minimum count may or may not be to the actual number of wolves present this past winter. The DNR will be initiating projects aimed at testing other methods of wolf monitoring for comparison with minimum wolf counts currently conducted.

**Hunter and Trapper Survey:** A preliminary summary included the following:

- There did not appear to be a huge number of permits that ended up in the hands of folks that had no intention to hunt or trap
- The number one reason for not participating included the closure of a zone before they had a chance to hunt or trap
- Most intended to hunt rather than trap (They were mostly motivated to lower the wolf impact on deer and game closely followed by pursuing an animal not previously hunted or trapped)
- About 2/3rd of all permits were active, with most non-active stating their zone closed or that they had intended to pursue wolves with dogs as to the reason they were not
- Foot holds were used more than cable restraints (restraints were only legal a couple of days)
- Calling was the most common hunting technique, followed by incidental to other hunting
- Most active hunters/trappers saw wolf sign
- 2/3rd of wolf pursuers selected an area based on predation to livestock, dogs, or game and it was an important factor in selecting an area.
- 1/3rd of wolf pursuers had to move due to zone closures, most felt we were fairly effective at alerting them of closures
- Success rates of trappers was significantly higher than that of hunters
- Wolf pursuers did not feel crowded, but trappers did feel more crowded than hunters
- Most harvesters kept their wolf as a mount or a tanned hide

- Ratings of quality were fairly neutral, but trappers did rate the season higher than hunters, of course they enjoyed a higher success rate so that is not surprising
- About 2/3rd of the permit winners said they would apply again, with no difference between successful and unsuccessful wolf harvesters.

**Population Model:** The UW-Madison Forestry and Wildlife Ecology Department wolf population model incorporates science on mortality, reproduction, immigration and dispersal. It can be used to predict impacts of various wolf harvest scenarios. When actual 2012 wolf depredation control kills and harvests were used in the model, it predicted a statewide wolf population similar to the number counted this past winter.

**Tribal Perspectives:** The following comments were shared with the committee:

- Belief that state may be violating Voigt case decisions including amount of social consideration in developing recommendations such as quotas.
- Belief that depredation control kills, harvest kills and illegal kills must all be in state's side of the quota.
- Belief that zone kills (depredation and harvest) should be managed together not independently, with particular targets in mind.
- Tribes don't support harvest but they can probably tolerate some harvest if it's not intended to substantially reduce the harvest like in MN and MI.
- They want core protection areas or refuges such as the reservations and 6 mile buffers.
- Tribal rights are more than a harvest right; also right to values of living resources.
- Desire for a fully functional ecological system including the number of wolves that are needed for such.
- Tribes are developing a Midwest wolf stewardship plan.
- Desire for state to be cautious with quotas considering the unknown....age of killed wolves, potential for super additivity (lower survival and reproduction of remaining wolves) that won't be known until after this year's quota is set.
- Consider current population to be small.
- Suggestion that the goals of the hunt are not very clear.
- Suggestion the hunt is ineffective at depredation control as most hunting and trapping kills are not from packs that are depredating livestock.
- Suggestion we need a joint wolf stipulation as with other species.

**Information Requested for Future Meetings:** We will ask for a presentation on some of the social aspects of wolf management. We will ask for modeling results of a range of quota options. We will try to provide more mapped data on wolf mortalities. We will summarize information on how other states are looking at counts and quotas. We will provide information on the level of tracking effort this past year compared to recent years. We will provide a more complete analysis of the hunter and trapper survey results and comments.

**First thoughts on 2013 Quotas and Licenses:** Members were asked not to fix on a number yet, but to share what their feelings are on quota and license number direction for 2013. A brief synopsis of individual comments includes:

- People expect population to be brought down; desired population reduction but not drastic; public won't be patient. If not, will lose support and more illegal kills.
- Take into account the depredation control kill. Be conservative. Consider the lawsuit.
- Would like a healthy increase in quota.
- We've only done this one year. Be conservative. Slight increase in quotas. Reduction in licenses.
- Increase quota to reduce the population. Ask public what they think about licenses per quota.
- For zones 1, 2 and 5 shoot for 10%; go liberal in 3 and 4 at 40%; go high in zone 6.
- Higher quotas. Wolves are resilient.
- Concerned about hotspot of depredation in far NW. Would like more data. Liberalize zone 6 (but concerned about zone jumping).

- Higher quotas. Keep licenses per quota the same.
- Increase the quota if keep population reduction objective. Very liberal in zone 6.
- Desires a slight conservative increase. Ask public what they want on licenses per quota.
- Concern about moving quotas too high considering lawsuit.
- Similar quota to last year. We don't know all of the impacts of the hunt yet (e.g. reproduction impacts; % of kill that were pups which might not have been assimilated into packs)
- Address customer concerns. Cautious increase in quotas. More tags with continued flexibility in zones.
- Higher quota. Stay at 10 to 1 for licenses.
- Similar to last year. Lower numbers of licenses per quota so don't close season so early.
- Higher quotas.
- Higher quota. Reduce ratio of licenses to quota. Zone 6 unlimited over the counter.
- Higher quota.

The average response was a conservative increase in quota and similar or lower ratio of licenses to quota with intent to lower population, but not making us vulnerable to legal challenges regarding responsible management. There were concerns about how close the count is to the actual number of wolves and how that relates to setting quotas.

**Next Meeting:** May 23 at Howard Johnson in Wausau from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

*Submitted by Bill Vander Zouwen, Chair*