

## **WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

8/22/2013 Wausau Howard Johnson's

**Introductions** – Bill Vander Zouwen thanked committee members and other attendees for coming and reminded everyone that this is an advisory committee and discussion is limited to members of the committee and invited presenters. There is a ½ hour time slot reserved for public comments at the end of the meeting. Planned presentations for the September meeting include Laine Stowell to speak about impacts of wolves on the elk population, and a veterinarian to speak about impacts of wolves on livestock. John Olson will speak at some point on the future of trapping and BMPs (Best Management Practices) for trapping.

**Livestock Depredation Issues** – Information and opinions in this section were provided by Dave Ruid, USDA-WS (Handout – Wolf depredation statistics in WI 1 January – 16 August 2013 Draft; PowerPoint).

### **Livestock depredation**

From 1974 to 2012:

- Wildlife Services (WS) has received 1930 wolf related complaints; 48% have been verified as wolf.
- WS has verified 547 cattle, 85 sheep, 16 horses depredated by wolves.

In 2012:

- WS received 184 wolf complaints, 95 were verified (similar to the 7 year average of 186 complaints and 94 verified).
- WS verified 53 cattle, 1 sheep, 9 fowl depredated by wolves.
- On farms experiencing depredation, an average of 1.7 calves/farm were depredated (range = 1-12)
- 57% of verified complaints and 41% of all wolf complaints were in wolf harvest zone (WHZ) 1; 55% of the affected farms were in WHZ 1.
- Douglas & Bayfield counties accounted for 27% of all wolf complaints and 74% of the complaints from April – September.
- 19 counties had verified complaints, 15 counties had livestock depredations.
- 29 packs were involved in livestock conflicts (13.6% of packs). Wolves were removed from 8 of those packs during the harvest season.

There has been a 42% reduction in farms experiencing wolf depredation since 2010. The number of affected farms seems to be stabilizing. The south shore of Lake Superior in Douglas & Bayfield counties is a hot spot for livestock depredation. Large farms have more problems and are more likely to become chronic depredation sites. There is seasonal variation in livestock depredation with the high season being May-mid October, and August being the busiest month. There is somewhat of a drop-off in June.

Secondary impacts can include:

- Stressed livestock that are difficult to handle
- Stampinging through fences

- Missing livestock
- Difficulty confining animals to specific pastures
- Disease / abortions possibly
- Time spent searching for calves & dealing with depredations
- Stress of knowing wolves have depredated livestock & wondering what's happening now
- Property damage such as punctures in silage bags & broken fences

#### Hunting dog depredation

Seven dogs were depredated in 2012, 5 in bear training or hunting. So far, 16 have been killed in 2013. Most are not using bells. Bells were recommended for a few years, but seemed to be ineffective. Four packs that depredated dogs last year have depredated dogs again this year.

#### Discussion & Questions:

- Husbandry practices & non-lethal methods to decrease depredation - Guard dogs seem to be fairly effective on some sheep farms, but can be difficult to keep confined with beef cattle & can be aggressive. Llamas & donkeys are sometimes used with cattle with varying success. Fladry is sometimes the best method for resolving conflict.
- Harvest zone recommendations to address livestock depredation - possibly a zone of aggressive harvest along the south shore of Lake Superior in Douglas & Bayfield counties. Hunters would have access to farms enrolled in the wolf control program, but may prefer to hunt in more wild land settings. Reducing the population should reduce conflicts.
- It would be difficult to separate the effect of wolves from other potential causes of secondary impacts such as coyotes, bears, storms. Research shows no difference in calf weight gain except on farms with verified depredations. Farms with secondary impacts probably have had verified depredation. It may be possible to quantify some of the costs of secondary effects.
- Producers may not always be reporting depredations – WS can only speak to what's been reported to them.
- Removal of wolves affecting pack dynamics resulting in increased depredation seems to be not the case. Lactating females were removed from 3 areas last year which have experienced less depredation this year. Last year, WS had 43 wolf control actions. So far, they've had 24 this year, 6 of which have been in the same areas as last year.

**Livestock Depredation Risk & Public Attitudes to Lethal Management** – Information and opinions in this section were presented by Adrian Treves & Jamie Hogberg – UW Madison (PowerPoint).

Livestock depredation risk map - Adrian presented information on a 2011 update of the livestock depredation risk map. Originally, 42 farmers in northern WI were interviewed in preparation of model development. The logistic regression model was designed to distinguish affected sites from unaffected sites. Higher risk is associated with more

grassland, pasture, & hay, nearness to known wolf packs, greater distance from forest, and the interaction between the wolf pack & forest components. The risk map developed in 2006 correctly classified 53 of 60 new affected sites (88%) from 2007-2009.

The 2011 risk map predicts depredation sites from 2010-2012 (published in *Bioscience* 61(6): 451-458).

- 90% of 175 depredation sites were classified as risky by the model
- 84% of 76 lethal control sites were classified as risky
- Overall, 69% of 251 sites appeared in the top 3 risk categories & 33% occurred in the highest risk category which comprised 5% of the state

The model also works to predict risk of threat & harassment. Individuals have been contacting Adrian to ask the risk associated with specific properties. The intent is to make the risk map available on his website. DNR will be able to link to it when it's ready. He suggests the state might use the model to target livestock producers in the top risk categories for supplying information on depredation management and shooting permits. There was discussion of using the risk map to inform decisions regarding wolf harvest zones, and that the risk map will change as wolf packs colonize new areas.

*\*Adrian indicated he is willing to share this presentation with committee members.*

Public opinion of wolves in WI – Jamie presented 2013 survey results. The survey sample was based on non-wolf range respondents from a 2004 survey and wolf range respondents from a 2009 survey. Response rate to the 2013 survey was 772 of 1311, or 59% (234 from non-wolf range, 538 from wolf range). Eighty-one percent were males, 70% were hunters (had hunted in the past 2 years, or had hunted regularly in the past).

Results include:

- 64% of wolf range respondents strongly approved of legislative decision to open wolf hunting/trapping; responses from outside wolf range were evenly spread
- 81% of respondents reported no change in tolerance as a result of harvest season
- 44.2% of respondents from wolf range moved towards less tolerance since 2009
- If no change what is your opinion of wolves,
  - “I like having wolves” = 37% (62% non-wolf range, 26% wolf range)
  - “I don't like having wolves, but tolerate it” = 15% non-wolf range, 38% wolf range
  - “Not tolerant of wolves” = 6% non-wolf range, 22% wolf range

Takeaway:

- A majority of wolf range residents support the hunt
- A majority report no change in their opinion towards wolves
- A majority report a positive or tolerant attitude toward wolves
- Fewer wolf range residents agree their tolerance of wolves has increased since they can be hunted

There was a request that speakers provide a copy of their presentations to committee members. Information on how to access information presented by speakers should be included in the Wolf Management Plan.

Public opinion of wolf hunting rules– Adrian presented 2013 survey results from the sample described by Jamie. Six percent had received(?) a wolf tag and 34% knew someone who had.

Results include (changes from 2009 to 2013 surveys):

- 52% - opposed to hunting wolf pups; 44% wolf range, 68% non-wolf range (+7%)
- 48% - no hunting at night (+7%)
- 44% - no hunting during breeding or pregnancy season
- 39% - no out-of-state hunters
- 36% - no use of traps
- 29% - no use of bait (+6%)
- No use of dogs (+7%)
- Only hunting wolves that caused property damage (+6%)
- All other rules (+3-5%)
- “I want to be able to hunt without restrictions” – 31% agree (41% in range, 11% out), 21% neutral, 48% disagree
- Overall, increased support for additional restrictions

Assessing public opinions – Attendees of public meetings are self-selected, and public meetings attract vocal minorities, resulting in a biased sample. The gold standard in scientific surveys includes a large sample size, and anonymous peer reviewed methods & results. Public surveys have over-sampled in wolf range because they are the most affected population, however, the public trust doctrine applies in WI. The Supreme Court vested government with fiduciary trust responsibility over wild animals. It is the government’s responsibility to manage wildlife for all citizens. To prove this obligation has been met, it’s important to document decisions and their rationale.

Discussion – There was discussion of what was considered wolf range for the survey, with some committee members disagreeing with Wausau being considered as wolf range. Human density was a consideration in selecting sample areas. Wausau was used because it seemed the best alternative for a sample from a high human density area in wolf range. The survey also measured people’s exposure to wolves. Samples from Wausau clustered more closely with other samples in wolf range than with samples outside of wolf range.

Discuss wolf social tolerance research plan – Information and opinions in this section were provided by Bob Holsman, WDNR.

A basic plan for a survey was developed by Bob and others and presented to the Wildlife Policy Team, which granted preliminary approval. The current cost estimate for the survey is ~\$71,000. The current proposal is for a 2-prong survey including residents of wolf range & non-wolf range.

Wolf range survey:

- 27 of 34 counties in wolf range
- 400 people/ county
- 8 page mail questionnaire

Non-wolf range survey:

- 2,000 randomly selected people
- 4 page mail questionnaire

The proposal includes using a wolf situation table similar to the MI survey which presented 5 possible situations and asked for preference, maximum, & minimum. Some possible methods for selecting survey recipients include voter registration lists (less gender bias), and commercially available lists (may be more male dominated). At this point, it's not known what questions will not be included in the non-wolf range survey.

### Timeline

Today – Wolf Advisory Committee input

Sept/Oct – Focus Groups / piloting testing

Nov/Dec – Mail survey administration

Jan/Feb – Data entry

Mar/Apr – Analysis

May – Preliminary results

June – Wolf Management Plan presented to NRB

### Discussion

- It's not worth doing unless the timeline is extended
- Should get a better response rate during the hunting season
- Surveying wolf hunters is not currently part of Brian Dhuey's assigned workload. It will need to be assigned in order for him to do that.
- Web surveys are not scientific. Some hybrid surveys can work as long as the sample can be controlled. The plan is to do a mail survey in this case.
- There was discussion of using 3 sampling zones including long occupied wolf range, newly occupied range, and non-wolf range. This will likely happen even with the 2 zone sampling.
- There was discussion of which counties to include in the wolf range sample.  
\***Bob will bring sampling alternatives to the next meeting.**

### Questions to ask

- Respondent profile - sex/age, education level, urban/rural, where they grew up, cultural background, recreational & occupational profile, group membership/identification, political ideology, experience/familiarity with wolves.
- Tolerance - using social carrying capacity model.
- What should be the objectives of the wolf management program (e.g. conflict management, sustainable harvest).
- How many, where do you want them, how should we get there. Management in current non-wolf range (acceptance of wolves in WMZ 6 or southern part of state).
- Methods for dealing with wolf conflicts & which problems warrant reaction; depredation payments.
- Do you support recreational hunting of wolves; importance of management for sustainable recreation; do you support refuges (use alternate term), & if so where; hunting methods & timing.

- Funding sources

*\*It was suggested that a list of decision points the plan will address be prepared for the next meeting.*

### **Future meetings**

September 24 – meeting at the same time & place will include 2 or 3 speakers, survey information, and possible review of the plan background section.

Oct. 21 – meeting

Nov. 19 - meeting

### **Public Input Opportunity**

Public Comment # 1 – Person clarified that she does not want the wolf population goal to remain at 350. She stated that many organizations and 19 counties have passed resolutions to leave the goal at 350. She also suggested that Minnesota wolves should be included in the population analysis for Wisconsin.

Public Comment #2 – Person lives on the Wisconsin River near Rhinelander and considers herself an environmentalist & naturalist. While walking her dogs on her property recently, one of her dogs was attacked by 2 wolves which got within 5 yds. of her before she scared them off. The attack was verified by USDA-WS and she will be reimbursed for the vet bill, but she is no longer comfortable walking in her woods. She now carries a handgun when she goes for a walk. She had seen wolves in the past and felt somewhat positive towards them, but this experience has changed her attitude.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.