

WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

12/11/2013 Wausau Howard Johnson Hotel

Introductions - Bill Vander Zouwen thanked the committee for their attendance and participation.

Today we will brainstorm ideas for the new wolf management plan. We will try to get as many ideas on the table that each member can take back to their respective constituents for discussion. We will not all agree on all issues but the goal is to work towards a proposal and ideas which we can eventually present to the Natural Resource Board. Member introductions were made. There was an article in this month's Wisconsin's Fur, Fish & Game about wolves and trapping in Wisconsin. Barry Gilbeck (DNR Customer Service) and Brian Dhuey (DNR Science Services) were thanked for their contributions to the Committee as they will be moving on from their memberships in January.

Wolf Management Draft Plan Discussion

- The species management plan format includes; background, 10-15 year goal and a vision for the future, specific objectives necessary to address issues presented in the background, and strategies for meeting objectives.

Depredation Background Section - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland and Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

- Currently written as management recommendations but will be rewritten to provide background on depredation in WI. This was written with a fully-functioning depredation program in mind.
- We will want to incorporate some of the information Dr. Palmquist presented at the last meeting.
- A handout was provided regarding a summary of secondary wolf damage on farms; this was included in the 2008 damage assessment from Wildlife Services. The committee will take time to consider this document when writing this section of the plan.
- The current draft describes depredation during the 1970-1990s as "rare". We should rephrase this as "uncommon" - more accurately describes these events.
- The committee discussed further issues with neosporosis. A useful study would be to look at whether neosporosis can infect captive white-tailed deer. It would provide information on whether decreased deer numbers could result from neosporosis.
- The plan will need to include the prevalence rate in and outside wolf range. If exposure rates are higher in wolf range, it could indicate that wolves have an effect on the prevalence of the disease.
- When the plan references wolf complaints it should say "reported complaints" and use "unconfirmed" or other terminology to describe other complaints.
- Other species of wildlife (bear and deer) cause damage on farms. For a corn producer we cannot remove all deer from around a farm, so is it equivalent to say that we cannot remove all wolves from around cattle producers? Future discussions regarding how wolves are viewed, like deer and bears, or like rabbits and groundhogs, will occur.
- Highlight that permits are not specifically issued to landowners with depredation but to landowners in areas with depredation.
- Make clear that there is a perception that livestock producers are being fully compensated and in reality they only are compensated for a portion of depredation issues.
- This section should include more discussion on pet depredation and indirect impacts of wolves.

- The committee discussed line-specific changes, terminology, moving of recommendations from the background section to the management section, and topics including depredation, funding, guard animals, pet depredation, proactive depredation controls, landowner permits, behavioral differences between harassed and non-harassed cattle, that certified citizen trappers were never used in Wisconsin, and timely reporting of depredation issues.

Legal Background and Listing Section - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- There is a significant overlap of sections with the Voigt decision although it will be included in this section as the legal aspects of wolf management with Tribes are important. We can also include a section for legal rights of Tribes in the plan.
- Note that the 1999 plan was reviewed and reapproved in 2007.
- The plan currently states that if the wolf population decreases in 3 consecutive years in zones 1 and 2 the USFWS will institute a program review. A review does not mean that they would relist wolves. This is a federal review, not a DNR review, and a Section 7 requirement of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) done with all delisted species. The plan can include the citation for this document for clarification. Minnesota operates under different regulations than Wisconsin and they have different established population thresholds.
- Federal listing requirements should be split into another section.
- The committee discussed line-specific changes, terminology, and topics including depredation control and depredation controls near Tribal reservations.

Statutory Authority Section - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- This section highlights for the public what management actions are in state law and what are written in policy. The Committee can make recommendations regarding changes to state law, although the authority to change laws is held by the state legislature.

Tables - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland and Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

- Double check that all tables are referenced appropriately in the text. The document can be sent through agency editors.

Management of Human-caused Mortality of Wolves Section - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- Include a section on the first harvest seasons and management, illegal take, and the 6 current management units (the 1999 plan references 4 units).
- Increased road densities can lead to increased human-caused wolf mortality. Road densities are not an indication of human population densities in northern Wisconsin. We should include background (current research on missing wolf mortalities in WI; unknown illegal kill) that highlights that in certain parts of the state there may be increased human-caused mortalities.
- The Michigan and Wisconsin wolf populations are considered one population when considering meta-population dynamics. Much of the research cited in respect to recent computer population models in Wisconsin was conducted in areas along the northern range of the wolf population

(Alaska and northern Canada). We do not have the same level of migration into the Wisconsin population as might occur in Alaska.

- The overwinter statewide population estimate is a standard method for referencing wolf numbers. We may want to clarify that if the minimum overwinter wolf count indicates a population of 800, the harvestable population in the fall will be higher as of recruitment.

BMP and Trapper Education Section - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- Highlight that we are using scientific research to evaluate humane trapping methods.
- The WI Trappers Association wants the wolf trapper's education course to be mandatory. There is a question included on the Spring Hearings agenda regarding mandatory wolf trapper's education. The Committee should develop a recommendation regarding this subject.

Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan Draft Mission Statement - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- The Committee reviewed management plan goals listed in 5 other states with established wolf populations; MN, MI, ID, MT, and WY. The Committee needs to develop a general summarized goal for the Wisconsin wolf management plan. Considering that the goals of other states were developed when populations were still listed, it is possible that some of these states may recommend goal changes now that wolves are delisted.
- Important terms and ideas for the mission statement noted by Committee members: long-term population sustainability, healthy population, minimize conflicts, provides ecological and cultural benefits, maintain population at huntable and trappable levels, keep populations from being reclassified, contribute to the national recovery of wolves (we are not operating in a vacuum), maintain portions of the state where wolves serve their full ecological functioning, honor the diverse perspectives of Wisconsin's people, maintain a population that keeps us out of a situation where wolves are relisted, addresses the challenges faced by people directly affected by wolves, management consistent with Chippewa Treaty rights (highlight the legal aspect of the plan), and honor diverse cultural backgrounds.
- The Committee discussed defining the following terms in the plan; conflict, viable, functional, and sustainable.
- These mission statements are composed of various parts and ideas, which alone, don't address all issues faced by wolves or people, but together they cover many issues of wolf management.
- The 1999 plan did not have a specific stated goal but does state a similar mission regarding maintaining a viable population while minimizing depredation issues.
- We know human-wolf conflicts will always exist; the goal is to reduce conflicts. The specific terminology, whether "minimize", "address", or "seek to resolve", will be determined later.
- Draft statement: *The Department of Natural Resources will maintain a healthy and sustainable wolf population providing ecological, cultural, and recreational benefits while recognizing the diverse perspectives of our citizens and (minimizing or addressing) conflicts.*

Where Wolf Populations Should be Encouraged - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- **These lists are only preliminary ideas and do not represent areas where wolf populations will or will not be encouraged in the revised plan. This practice was used in order to get ideas on the table for Committee members to consider and for them to present to their represented constituencies.**
- Some areas, such as National Forest surrounding agricultural farms - we may have areas where we are encouraging wolf populations with pockets of active controls.
- May use metrics such as road densities, although increased densities correlate with mortality in all species (bear, deer, etc.) and there are areas of the state with high road densities and low human densities.
- Some examples provided by committee members included: areas of suitable primary or secondary habitat; Northern and Central Forest regions; areas with a low chance for human conflicts; county, state, and federal lands; large contiguous forested areas with few farms; Tribal lands and the Ceded territories; current management zones 1-5; areas capable of supporting ≥ 1 wolf pack, and the areas identified most recently by Mladenoff research.

Where Wolf Populations May be Discouraged - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- **These lists are only preliminary ideas and do not represent areas where wolf populations will or will not be encouraged in the revised plan. This practice was used in order to get ideas on the table for Committee members to consider.**
- We should maintain broad objectives for locations where wolf populations may persist with a concept of “hot-spot” areas where there are high-conflict areas with active controls
- Some examples provided by committee members included: various areas of southern Wisconsin; fragmented forest and farm mosaic landscapes; current management zone 6; urban areas; and agricultural areas.
- If there is a current legal definition of “agriculture” in state statute and the term is used in the revised plan, it should be defined.
- Use predictive models of growing human urban areas to identify areas where wolves are unlikely to persist in the future due to urban and human expansion - Radeloff WUI housing density model.

Criteria for Conflict Levels - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- **These lists are only preliminary ideas and do not represent final criterion for the revised plan. This practice was used in order to get ideas on the table for Committee members to consider.**
- What objectives should the Committee consider in the development of plan objectives?
- The USDA Wildlife Services was limited in the use of removal controls in the two years prior to delisting although now have removal authority and are actively working with landowners to remove wolves habitually depredating livestock.
- Need to base criteria on available data, not anecdotal reports that wolf depredations have probably occurred but were not reported.
- Farms with chronic depredation, or areas where 2+ farms have reported depredation issues.
- Percentage of packs involved in conflict area.

- Zero tolerance for human threats - USDA-Wildlife Services definition. We need to define this carefully as there is a difference for threats at a person's home and threats while someone is out in the middle of a National Forest in core wolf population areas. There are reported complaints and there are anecdotal complaints. We need to use the professional evaluation method (USDA-WS) for determining threats, depredation, etc.

What Are We Trying To Accomplish with Plan - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- **These lists are only preliminary ideas and do not represent final goals for the revised plan. This practice was used in order to get ideas on the table for Committee members to consider.**
- Use the overwinter minimum count to decide if the population is increasing, decreasing, or stable; stay away from the concept of "when the population was at 350". Focus on metrics that we can measure; reimbursement amounts, number of farms with depredation issues, harvest quota, etc.
- Design a program that uses a full suite of tools to manage the population.
- Minimize depredation issues towards an acceptable number of verified complaints annually.
 - 35 total verified complaints (compensation level associated with 2003-04)
 - Level of conflict which occurred during late 1990s/early 2000s
 - ≤15 farms with depredation issues.
- Cost of depredation reimbursement.
 - One trophy buck could cost \$15,000; steps are needed to account for these higher-dollar losses. Ten of one animal lost in one year may not be the same value as 10 of another animal in the next year.
 - Reimbursements were higher when the wolf population was lower. A few wolves can cause a lot of damage. We can have a large statewide population when we actively remove individual wolves that cause depredation issues. During the past 2 years, with existing controls, the USDA-WS has reduced depredation reimbursements.
- Provide a minimum annual quota of 100 wolves for hunting/trapping opportunities.
- Some examples provided by committee members included: keep wolves from being relisted again; develop ecologically functioning wolf populations on Tribal and non-Tribal lands, maintain wolf populations beyond National Forest lands; obtain and diversify funding sources; increase public tolerance through goal setting; address population health issues (when and what should be done with disease), reduce public concerns; minimize non-recreational killing of wolves (poaching, depredation kills, etc.); manage multiple user conflicts; increase research efforts; develop a concept of hot-spot management, reduce populations in unsuitable wolf range.

Comments from Public in Audience

- A citizen from Lincoln County addressed the Committee regarding conflict issues on their property.
 - The couple was thanked for sharing their stories and for taking the time to come to today's meeting.

Next Meeting: The next WAC meeting will be on Tuesday, Jan. 21st

Future - brainstorm actual ways to accomplish these objectives.

February Meeting: The February WAC meeting will be on Wednesday, Feb. 12th.