

WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

2/12/2014 Wausau Howard Johnson Hotel

Introductions - Bill Vander Zouwen noted that a draft wolf management plan may be completed by September. The Committee will go through the public survey results to determine whether there are any other issues that need to be addressed. The Committee will address management zone delineation in the future for Natural Resource Board approval. The Committee will need to meet with the Voigt Taskforce, DNR administration, and various stakeholder groups as well. A summary of topics for discussion at the current meeting was presented including depredation, human health and safety, the Committee member survey, areas where wolf populations may be encouraged/discouraged, population goals, tribal issues, the Central Forest, and Committee and plan goals. The next meeting should focus on management zone delineation and zone goals. Dave MacFarland, DNR large carnivore specialist and Committee Chair, will replace Bill Vander Zouwen as the Committee facilitator. The Committee praised Bill Vander Zouwen for his work and service to the Committee and wished him the best in his future employment.

Wolf Management Draft Plan Discussion - Topics discussed today are related to the development of a new wolf management plan. All draft chapters of the plan will be presented to the Committee for approval. Approval by the DNR administration and Natural Resource Board are also required.

Pet Depredation - Discussion directed by Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

Pet Depredation - Private Lands

- USDA-WS receives a complaint and independently investigates/confirms depredations. For confirmed depredations, landowners may qualify for a max compensation of \$2,500/pet - number set in administrative rule. Depending on acreage size, landowners may or may not be required to allow public hunting; handled consistently with livestock depredation.
- Depredation of hunting hounds in the act of hunting does not qualify as pet depredation; considered pet depredation if incident occurs at a residence.
- Compensation exists for pets injured by but not killed by wolves.
- Occurrence and location of pet depredations has been random; hunting hound depredation has been more predictable. Currently only compensate persons for wolf depredations; not bear or coyote. Compensation funded through license sale revenues. Only administrative rule specific to wolf and cougar depredation exists. Bears cannot be shot because of conflicts; bird feeders, etc. Wolf rules should be consistent with other species.
- The current administrative rule was established to minimize unregulated wolf killing. Administrative rule states landowners may shoot a wolf in the act of killing a pet. Administrative rule includes killing, wounding, or biting a domestic animal. Administrative rule does not authorize the killing of wolves in the act of attacking pets on public lands, and does not specify whether a pet must be on a leash or not; issues of misuse may occur if this rule is changed. The DNR law enforcement agrees that expanded language should only apply to public lands and the term, "attacking", allows LE discretion as every situation is different; language should outline clear rules for enforcement to minimize illegal killing. The Committee should clarify: 1) the term,

“attacking”, 2) a distance requirement from a residence, and 3) that if a person is in the act of violating the law when a depredation occurs (all laws) they do not qualify for compensation.

- Wolves in close proximity to structures do not imply depredation or an attempt to depredate by wolves; removal of wolves for sole reason that they are near structures will likely cause negative issues.

Pet Depredation - Public Lands

- Administrative rule does not authorize the shooting of bears in the act of attacking pets on public lands; rules regarding wolves should be consistent. These types of attacks involving wolves are extremely rare (very few reported/confirmed); inherent risks are associated with walking pets on public lands. A human threat component exists in administrative rule. If state code allows the shooting of wolves in protection of pets on public lands, rules may not apply to federal lands. Expanding the authority may open bear hunters to kill wolves while training/hunting.

Compensation - Violations of Law

- Compensation should not be provided to individuals who experienced pet depredation while in the act of violating the law; this must only address in the act violations, not past violations. A person must be in compliance with all laws at the time of depredation.

Education

- A “living with wolves” document similar to the “living with bears” document should be developed.

Hunting Hound Depredation - Discussion directed by Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

Hunting Hound Depredation

- USDA-WS receives a complaint and independently investigates/confirms depredations. For confirmed depredations, landowners may qualify for a max compensation of \$2,500/hound - number set in administrative rule. No controls are used on public lands but for incidents on private lands, landowners may access management controls. Alerts are posted to the DNR webpage as an educational tool and include a 4-mile buffer around depredations.
- Compensation sources - \$250,000 from licenses and application sales, plus \$50,000 grant from US Department of Interior. In 2013, \$140,000 paid in compensation. Currently, license and application fees are adequate to fund compensations but not all wolf management and research programs. Remaining funds go towards other wolf-related management activities; in 2013, funds were allocated to the USDA-WS.
- Typically, 13-18 hunting hounds killed per year; 2013 - 23 hounds killed.

Administrative Rule

- Expand language to include that hunters must be in compliance with all laws at the time when the depredation event occurs to receive compensation; includes all laws, not just hunting laws.
- Hunting violations can be determined after the fact; other investigations may be required by USDA-WS.

- Trespassing is a violation of the law; it is common that bear hounds trespass on private properties in pursuit of bears. Hounds are not always within distance for shock collar use. It is unlikely that many hounds are killed by wolves while in the act of trespassing. The USDA-WS must have landowner permission prior to investigating the depredation of trespassing hounds. These situations may not be verified and thus not compensated. The DNR law enforcement can investigate trespassing but do not investigate depredations.
- Bear hunters are currently compensated for bear hounds killed by wolves while in the act of hunting bear. Currently, bear hunters are not compensated for hounds killed by bears while in the act of hunting bear and wolf hunters are not compensated for hounds killed by wolves while in the act of hunting wolves. The wolf depredation compensation program began in 1982 while the species was designated as a federally endangered species; USDA-WS was not authorized to remove depredating individuals. Rules should be consistent between wolves and bear/other wildlife species; wolves are now a state-managed species. If current inconsistent policies are continued, they will need to be explained with justification.
- In years when insufficient funds exist to reimburse livestock depredations, it will be controversial to compensate for hunting hound losses; livestock is a person's means of living although some hunting guides have hounds as a means of living as well. A discussion should occur regarding pro-rating all depredation losses so each person receives some level of compensation in years when compensation funds are limited, even if below the max allowed; nothing currently exists in administrative code to allow this.
- The DNR worked with sportsman's groups to encourage the natural recolonization of the wolf population under the assumption that the DNR would compensate for depredation losses. The agreement was based on wolves being classified as an endangered species. The current wolf management plan notes that when wolves are listed as a game species, compensation for hound losses would be eliminated; this has not been done yet. Under administrative code, when listed as a threatened/endangered species, funding for depredation is through the endangered resources fund, and when listed as a game species, this fund may no longer be used for compensation. It may be viewed as inconsistent to compensate livestock losses but not hunting hound losses.
- If multiple hound depredations occur in some geographic area, within a specified short timeframe, perhaps allow USDA-WS to use control tools.
- Focus must also aim at the protection of hunting hounds; the Wolf Advisory Committee can make recommendations to the Bear Advisory Committee pertaining to baiting and feeding regulations that could reduce hound depredation, i.e., start bear baiting later in the season/year.
- Rules pertaining to the killing of wolves in the act of attacking hunting hounds should be consistent with those pertaining to pets.

Management of Packs Involved in Multiple Hound Depredations

- Can develop rules that target management towards these packs on private lands, although cannot do so for packs on county or federal lands.
- Proactive trapping and the use of certified citizen trappers would not be allowed on federal lands except during the regulated harvest season.
- The USDA-WS has a wolf Environmental Assessment (EA) that addresses trapping/removal on public lands; a new EA would be needed to implement proactive controls. All EAs go through a

public review process. The USDA-WS will not implement controls on properties without the approval of the private landowner or governmental agency.

- The US Forest Service would not favor the control of wild animals on USFS lands when the use of hounds is allowed for the pursuit of game species; this is a policy that affects multiple species and states and it is unlikely the USFS would allow the use of controls, even if USFS lands were within designated “hotspot” areas.
- The County Forest Association would likely support depredation controls for instances where there are multiple verified depredations.
- For livestock depredation abatement, management controls are specifically targeted to a specified property in a timely manner. The allocation of resources to control packs that frequently depredate hunting hounds would likely reduce resources needed to manage livestock depredation. If control trapping is utilized to remove these wolves, a risk exists that hunting hounds may also be captured, and thus these public lands may require a hunting closure; currently, hunters may choose to voluntarily stop chasing wolves in these areas.
- In 2013, 3 packs (12-15 wolves) were involved in multiple hound depredations; the long-term trend is unknown. In 2013, there was an organized effort by some hound hunters to target packs involved in hound depredation; this type of activity is in a manner proactive control.

Education

- The Wis. Bear Hunters Association places depredation information on their website; not all public have internet access. Need to disseminate contact information so the public knows who they can call for information or to access to depredation compensation assistance. Cautionary information is typically located on the DNR web site; current depredation events. The Wis. Trappers Association magazine will publish an article discussing depredation along with contact information; work to get this information in other publications, i.e., Wis. Outdoor News, etc.
- Timely information regarding current depredation is important so hunters can make decisions on if and where they want to hunt; help them evaluate the risks. Information provided during the training season in the summer may be valuable come the fall hunting season.
- Information regarding ways to avoid negative wolf-hound conflicts should be provided.
- The Committee should focus on how to reduce hound depredation through changes to the bear baiting regulations; data indicates that a later bear baiting season in Michigan (2 weeks prior to the start of the harvest season) may contribute to lower conflict rates. The Bear Advisory Committee will address this topic as well; changes, if any, will be reflected in the updated bear management plan. The Wolf Advisory Committee should develop specific recommendation if interested in pursuing baiting and feeding regulation changes. May need to consider bear baiting for the purposes of stand hunting and hound hunting as two separate issues; bear bait setters are a larger contingent of bear hunters compared to hound hunters. A problem exists regarding wolf use of bear baits. In 2013, hunter survey results (Class A and B permit holders) indicated that 11,363 hounds were on the landscape during the training season; average of 16-18 days/hound; hounds accounted for >100,000 training-days; approximately 5 hounds used/hunter.

Human Health and Safety - Discussion directed by Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

Human Health and Safety

- USDA-WS receives a complaint and independently investigates/confirms safety issue. With confirmed human safety issues, shooting permits or USDA-WS trapping may be allowed.
- There is a difference between real and perceived threats; education can be used to address perceived threats. Perceived threats are very real as well. Management actions should be in response to human health and safety issues, not perceived threats.
- There have not been any wolves killed while in the act of violating human health and safety, although shooting permits have been issued after the fact. The current USDA language states a “demonstrative threat.”
- Should publish statistics to show that the risk of being attacked by a wolf is considerably less than those associated with other wildlife.
- Develop and distribute a “living with wolves” document.

Wolf Advisory Committee Member Survey - Discussion directed by Bill Vander Zouwen with comments provided by Committee members.

Wolf Advisory Committee Member Survey

- The new wolf management plan should address wolf impacts on the deer population, whether significant or minimal; under development and will be provided to the Committee for review.
- The Committee is split on the use of the terms, “minimize” and “reduce”; will readdress later.
- The Committee will discuss further whether the Central Forest is an area where wolf populations should be encouraged. The CF has many attributes consistent with areas where populations should be encouraged. The Mladenoff 2009 habitat suitability model indicated that the CF may be a hotspot for livestock conflicts although there were no confirmed livestock depredations in the CF in 2013.
- The Committee will not consider elk range as a decision-making point. The Elk Advisory Committee may make recommendations to the Wolf Advisory Committee if they choose. The elk population growth was slow for the first 8 years of reestablishment although only one confirmed wolf depredation occurred. Trapping is currently prohibited in the Clam Lake area of elk range due to restrictions pertaining to pine martin protections.
- The Committee will not encourage populations in the Driftless Region. There is considerable forest habitat although the area is primarily agricultural; identified as an area of high conflict risk.
- The eastern half of wolf harvest zone 3 is more likely an area to encourage populations compared to the western half. Can split zones into smaller units although large units are easier to manage, and when conflicts arise, they can be addressed through various controls. Wolf harvest zones may be considered as a starting point for evaluating areas where wolf populations may be encouraged; considerable input and consideration was used to develop zones. Spatial data regarding previous Deer Management Units may also be a good starting point.
- Population goals that involved a specific number (specified harvest, specified number of confirmed depredations, etc.) were rated lower than other goals.
- Deer predation is an issue addressed by the Deer Advisory Committee and it is up to their discretion whether recommendations pertaining to wolf management in regards to deer should be developed. Increased deer predation research was recommended as part of the Deer Trustee

Report implementation process; there is currently a deer predation study ongoing in Wisconsin. Current data does not indicate that the Wolf Advisory Committee needs to address this subject at this time. Data collected through the University of Wisconsin-Madison indicates that wolves are not impacting deer populations at the landscape-level, although localized impacts may exist. Management decisions should be science-based, and the science should be reviewed objectively; decisions should not be made based on perceived impacts.

Summary of issues voted on by the committee:

- Any issue may be placed before the Committee for vote as to provide all members an opportunity to provide input.

Expand administrative rule language authorizing landowners to kill wolves in the act of livestock or pet depredation on private lands to include “attacking”. This is a board definition that will apply to livestock and pets.

**Voted on and accepted

Expand administrative rule language to allow pet owners to shoot wolves in the act of attacking pets on public lands.

**Voted on and (6 yes) (12 no) - split vote, rejected - will discuss with DNR administration further.

Expand administrative rule language to allow hunters to shoot wolves in the act of attacking hunting hounds on public lands.

**Wording clarification required - vote delayed until April, 2014 meeting. (UPDATE – voted on and rejected at 4/29 Wolf Advisory Committee meeting – please refer to April Committee notes)

Provide no compensation to pet owners or hunters who experience a depredation while in the act of violating the law (in the act violations include hunting, leash, or other laws; not past violations), i.e., persons must be in compliance with all laws at the time of depredation to receive depredation compensation.

**Voted on and accepted.

Hunters must be in compliance with all laws (excluding trespass laws) to receive depredation compensation for hunting hounds killed by wolves.

**Voted on and accepted.

A hunting hound killed by wolves must be in compliance with trespass laws for the hound owner to receive compensation for the loss, i.e., a hunter will not receive depredation compensation for a hound killed while in the act of trespassing.

**Voted on and rejected; maintain current rule, situation is probably uncommon.

Discontinue compensation payments to hunters for hounds killed by wolves while in the act of hunting (now that wolves are listed as a game species and a regulated harvest season exists).

**Voted on and (9 yes) (8 no) - split decision - will discuss with DNR administration further.

Create a prioritized compensation system where livestock claims are paid-out first, and additional compensation payments for hunting hounds are paid out subsequently. This may address the potential situation where compensation funds are limited and not all livestock and hound depredations can be compensated in any given year.

**Voted on and (11 yes) (5 no) - split decision - will discuss with DNR administration further.

Use proactive management controls to remove packs/wolves known to habitually depredate hunting hounds while in the act of hunting.

**Voted on and rejected.

Develop recommendations pertaining to reducing hound depredation through modification of the bear baiting and feeding regulations (e.g., shorten the bear baiting season).

**Voted on and accepted - will be considered in further broader discussions.

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

April Meeting: The April WAC meeting will be on Tuesday, April 29, 2014.