

# **WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

4/29/2014 Wausau Howard Johnson Hotel

**Introductions** - Dave MacFarland thanked the Committee for their attendance. Bill Vander Zouwen will no longer act as Committee facilitator. Introductions were made: Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Timber Wolf Alliance, Wisconsin Cattleman's Association, DNR Northern District, DNR Southern District, DNR West-central District, DNR Northeast District, DNR Customer Services, DNR Law Enforcement, Wisconsin County Forest Association, US Forest Service, Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Safari Club Int'l, DNR Forest Wildlife Specialist, Conservation Congress, USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services, US Fish and Wildlife Services, DNR Wildlife Damage Specialist, DNR Science Services, and DNR Large Carnivore Specialist. Guests in attendance included: DNR Science Services, Wildlife Federation, volunteer wolf tracker, Polk County resident, Humane Society, University of Massachusetts, Bad River Tribe, DNR Wildlife Health, and DNR Lands Division Director. Information regarding future population size objectives was provided along with information on wolf depredation and wolf research papers regarding hunter surveys conducted in ID and MT. Information on how the Committee should proceed as there is no longer a separate Committee facilitator, the potential for bringing in a 3<sup>rd</sup> party facilitator considering the complexity of issues, and Dave MacFarland's role as both Chair and facilitator was provided. The potential for Deb Beyer, who facilitates the Beaver Task Force, is an option for starting as facilitator June, along with other options. The continued goal of the Committee is to allow everyone an opportunity to speak as to facilitate open discussions. Dave is looking for feedback from Committee members to ensure that discussions are unbiased and so his current role as facilitator and Chair do not hamper open discussions. The shared role of Committee Chair and facilitator currently occurs in other Committees.

**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.**

**Role of the Wolf Advisory Committee (WAC)** - Discussion directed by Kurt Thiede, DNR Land Division Director, with comments provided by Committee members.

- The department supports Dave MacFarland as Chair and facilitator for as long as needed.
- The department thanks the Committee for their involvement and work.
- This information will be provided to all other Committees as well as an established protocol.
- Goal is to provide clarification on what recommendations the Committee may consider.

## **Role of WAC Committee**

- To make recommendations to the Lands Division, which then go to the DNR Secretary and Wildlife Policy Team, and then to the Natural Resource Board.
- The Committee may consider items in the statutory scope of department's authority or items that the department has rule making authority.
- The Committee should not advocate for statutory change. If members feel there are items that require statutory changes, they may pursue those through their independent affiliations.

- In the past there was a round-table discussion for wolf stakeholder groups to discuss wolf topics with department administration, this will likely be done again to provide all groups, and those not represented on the WAC, an additional opportunity to provide input.
- *Tentative timeline*: Preliminary recommendations are expected by late summer with a draft plan presented to the Committee afterwards for discussion and review. Public comment will be collected in fall through both written comment and public meetings. The WAC will review public comments and respond with additional recommendations in fall. A redrafted plan (green sheet) will be presented to the Natural Resource Board with a 30-day public comment period. The current goal is that the NRB will vote on the plan at the February, 2015 board meeting. The NRB will provide final approval although legislative approval is needed for the final rule. The goal is to complete this process for implementing management changes in 2015.
  - The WAC will work on the final rule and management plan concurrently.
  - The NRB will address both the final rule and management plan at the same meeting.

List of Statutory and Non-statutory Issues - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland, Committee Chair and DNR Large Carnivore Specialist, with comments provided by Committee members.

- List of items was developed in conjunction with DNR regulations specialist and DNR lawyers.
- Additional clarification can be obtained by DNR legal services where necessary.

List of Statutory Issues

- **The below items are not within the rule making authority of the DNR. These items are established in state law.**
  - Hunting season: the establishment and framework (single season, no split season).
  - Funding.
  - Permit issuance: 50% permits allocated in lottery, 50% allocated by preference point.
  - Season dates (Oct. 15 to last day in Feb., or until quota is met)
  - Closure areas: no area may be closed to wolf hunting or trapping.
  - License fees.
  - Tag transfer system: a person cannot receive more than one tag in any year.
  - License type: a single license to allow both hunting and trapping.
  - Zone closure mechanisms and department responsibility: 24-hour notice, press releases.
  - Methods of take: firearm, bow, and crossbow allowed; caliber of weapon and shot size; use of dogs for pursuit and number of dogs used; use of bait; use of calls; use of traps and dates of use; and requirement to return radio telemetry devices to department.
  - Depredation compensation for hounds not used in wolf hunting.
  - Education requirements: general trapper education required (mandatory wolf trapper education would require a statutory change). The Legislature has authorized specific authority regarding education to the department but not other authorizations.
- In the new plan, provide information on where each of these statutes are listed.
- Dave can distribute the wolf bill to the WAC - Act 169. Other items are listed in other statutes.

List of Items within the Department's Rule-making Authority.

- **The below items are within the rule-making authority of the DNR. These items are not established in state law.**

- Harvest zone boundaries and delineation.
- Harvest quotas.
- Number of harvest license issued.
- How and where licenses are issued: statewide or zone-specific licenses.
- Management objective: currently 350 wolves statewide.
- Authority on trap types and setting: jaw spread, break-away devices, etc. Cannot regulate to the point that they will not be effective tools.
- Zone closure criteria.
- Depredation compensation amounts for various depredation types.
- Depredation response and landowner permitting.
- Hunting hours.
- Tagging and transportation requirements.
- Dog training requirements.
- Criteria to maintain federal delisting is not in statute, but must be considered. Provide in new plan the US Fish and Wildlife Service policy as an informational item.
- Provide clarification on the department's authority on when to close harvest seasons.

**Wolf Harvester Survey** - Discussion directed by Brian Dhuey, DNR Science Services, with comments provided by Committee members.

#### Survey Review

- In 2012, 1,100 permits were issued; everyone not a youth were sent a survey.
- In 2013, 2,500 permits were issued; about 50% of non-youth applicants authorized to purchase a tag were sent a survey. **Survey data are preliminary.**
- Harvest season closed on Dec. 23. Surveys were mailed on Jan. 7 and reminder letters were mailed three weeks later. A second questionnaire was sent to non-respondents.
- About 800 surveys returned; very good response rate. Still receiving 3-5 surveys per week.
- Some survey question results were not presented as they were cross-questions with the human dimensions survey; those results are pending and will be presented later.
- This is not a general public survey, this is a survey of people authorized to purchase a wolf tag.
- 2012 data is available on the DNR web site, keyword search, 'reports'.
- The 2013 report will be presented to the Committee when data are available. The WAC was thanked for authorizing the survey and the data it provides is believed to be very good.

#### 2013 Survey Summary

- More applicants intended to hunt than trap; slight decline in hunting though. More applicants trapped in 2013 than in 2012.
- Percent of applicants who did not participate in season increased as result of fast zone closures, and average number of days afield decreased.
- License sales decreased, likely because people waited to see how long zones remained opened.
- In 2013, 16% of active participants used hounds and averaged 5 days afield. Only one zone was open for hound use.
- Most participants saw wolf sign.

- Most participants chose an area to pursue because of active livestock, dog, or game predation. This data is likely biased as many likely participated on lands that they deer hunt or see both wolf and deer sign.
- Most thought it was easy to find a place to participate.
- The average start date for participation was Oct 23, 2013. Participants started as soon as possible to ensure an opportunity to participate before zone closures or to ensure the best opportunity to harvest a wolf.
- Most kept the pelt for taxidermy/tanning; few entered the fur trade in Wisconsin.
- Trappers and those who harvested a wolf rated the experience higher.
- Most indicated they will apply for a tag in the future.
- There was moderate support for creating smaller zones or subzones.
- Issuing of fewer permits was strongly opposed; issuing of more permits was neither supported nor opposed.
- The development of early and late hunting/trapping periods was strongly supported.
- The use of certified citizen trappers outside of private lands was strongly opposed.
- Issuing over-the-counter or unlimited permits in areas of high human conflict was strongly supported.
- Harvesters did not generally complain about the condition/quality of pelts (60-65% indicated pelts were thickly furred). This is only the second season and so the public's experience with wolf pelts and their ability to judge quality may be limited. Wisconsin is pursuing CITES authority for wolves; authority may be issued by this fall.

**Update on Public Survey** - Discussion directed by Bob Holsman, DNR Science Services, with comments provided by Committee members.

- Documents summarizing survey methodology were provided.

#### **Survey Review**

- An initial draft was presented to the WAC with productive feedback provided; questions were added and background information was removed to streamline survey and decreased likely bias. Input was collected from national researchers that provided useful data on development. Focus groups were used to test survey and were instrumental in development. Overall, input in this process was very high.
- Maps were removed: did not work well in focus groups; resulted in less focus on questions.
- Questions were more qualitative (i.e., more, less, the same).
- Surveys mailed to 8,750 households (large sample size); recipients identified from commercial list of citizens developed from US census records. 85% of mailings had the recipient's name.
- Oversampled in areas of the state where wolves exist; started with counties with  $\geq 1$  wolf pack. Considered wolf pack density, human density, and geography; created a ratio to cluster counties by wolf and human populations (11 cluster groups).
  - Oversampling was not to bias survey results but rather to be able to break northern data down into smaller geographic scales to get more refined results. Get more area-specific information for setting quotas, population objectives, or delineating harvest zones.

- A uniform random sample was used (rather than stratification by zip code) because areas with large urban areas probably influence counties as a whole culturally. Economically, stratified survey by zip code was considerably more costly. May be able to separate data into urban/non-urban categories.
- The states of Montana and Idaho send out several thousand surveys annually with the cost funded by license fees, although surveys are considerably less detailed than the one developed for Wisconsin. Discussion on the development of a more general survey will occur when the WAC considers population monitoring.

### 2014 Questionnaire

- Preliminary data will be presented to the WAC at the May meeting; the WAC requests survey results a couple days ahead of meeting for review. Results may be presented by county or by county cluster, depending on the variability in data responses by county. Data will need to be reviewed to determine usefulness/reliability of county and county cluster data. Data is flexible and can be re-aggregated as needed. Final results will be available in summer.
- Surveys were mailed to selected participants and a second packet was sent two weeks later to those who didn't initially respond.
- Surveys are still being received in large number. To date, 56% of surveys have been returned which is very high for public survey; 30% of these entered electronically.
- The Committee thanked Bob for his work and praised the survey product and his ability to incorporate member's input into the survey's development.
- Wisconsin's public survey has worked better than the one conducted in Michigan in the 1990s likely because Wisconsin has more experience with wolves, the Wisconsin survey was vetted through focus groups, and the results of failed surveys could be used to tweak the Wisconsin survey. The survey was designed to measure public experiences with wolves. The Wisconsin public has real-world experience where the Michigan survey focused on hypothetical situations.

### Data Requests for Plan Development - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- Goal is to record all items requested although some may or may not be possible to develop or provide reliable information.
- These lists can be amended to include other items as needed.
- The 2014 harvest season will occur the same as in 2013 although the Committee will discuss quotas at the May meeting; Jen Stenglein, DNR Science Services, will present modelling data.

### List of Data

- Public survey data by county clusters.
- Harvest and other mortality data by county (in table form).
- Age and sex data by county.
- Public/private land data by county and current management unit (available land and harvest data).
- Conservation Congress Spring Hearing survey results and results from wolf-related resolutions.
- Pack size by zone (average number of individuals), and track survey data and pilot observations used to develop a statewide average by zone. An average pack size is calculated statewide

although this is not used to make further extrapolation. Developing zone-specific averages hasn't been done in the past although can be done for this purpose.

- Track survey data by block/zone/state to determine reliability; survey effort, counts, completeness of track efforts, confidence intervals, or error estimates. Further clarification is needed on how data is developed/used as inconsistencies may exist.
- Population models (last two harvest years).
- Days each zone was open in 2012 and 2013.
- Quota allocation (harvest rate by zone).

#### List of Maps

- Agricultural land density map.
- Road density map.
- Human population density (permanent and seasonally) map.
- Pack territories/pack distribution.
- Depredation sites by zone including Zone 1A and chronic farms, and by type of depredation.
- Prey availability (deer density by county).
- Survey block map.
- Ceded Territory boundary, tribal reservation boundaries, and non-reservation tribal lands by zone.
- Mladenoff habitat suitability maps.
- Conflict probability maps (Eric Olson).
- Base maps for delineating harvest zones - current harvest zone, county boundary, old Deer Management Unit, and public survey county cluster maps.
  - Discuss clarifications of any confusing boundaries.
  - Consider the impact of zone shape and size on user groups (i.e., hound hunting).
- Distribution of livestock producers.

**2013-14 Wolf Population** - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

#### Data Analysis Process

- With the transition of wolves from a protected to a game species, specific location information is not being made available to the public regarding individual wolves as it could bias research information. This is consistent with other species with regulated harvest seasons. This process started last year and is continuing for the 2013-14 analysis. Aggregated data is still made available to the public as done with other species.
  - The public was not notified on this change which is problematic for some Committee members. The sentiment is that the process should be more transparent.
- A lack of confidence in count data exists among the public. For the past 20 years, the public was allowed to participate in discussions regarding data and the transparency has not improved confidence. Transparency is important as well as input from the public at local scales.
- The Committee must consider the desires of volunteer trackers who help collect the data and those of the general public; i.e., retention of volunteer trackers verse public transparency. A survey of trackers may be necessary.

- In the past, WAC members were invited to participate in meetings regarding the generation of population data, this was considered helpful.
- The use of a minimum population count has been problematic with public interpretation of data. The department stands by the method and the data. It is a number that can be compared from year to year. This method of count is similar to how other species are counted; deer are counted in the same fashion, after the harvest season to develop a post-hunt estimate, although pre-hunt numbers have been presented to the public in the past (however, this is changing with the switch to qualitative population goals; i.e., increase, decrease, or stabilize).
- A report on tracker effort for 2013/14 is not currently available as surveys were just completed.
- Local densities of wolves are not likely to change annually and so there is some consistency between numbers from year to year.
- The Tribes are not allowed to participate in the data generation process and have since requested all of the data used to develop counts so they can generate independent counts.

#### Population Data

- The 2014 minimum winter population count was 658-687. The statewide population decreased 19% from the 2012 to 2013 minimum winter count.
- Overall mortality rate: 28% in 2012, 45% in 2013 (based on minimum winter count). The scientific literature suggests a human caused mortality rate between 25-30% will result in population stabilization. We observed stabilization in 2012-13 following a 28% mortality rate. The 2013-14 mortality rate of 45% represents a 17% increase from 2012-13; we observed a 19% decrease in the population. This suggests the literature values used provide useful insight into harvest impacts to the Wisconsin population.
- Population change at zone level indicates that zones are not acting as closed systems.
- Mortality data and a map of 2013 depredation controls and harvest mortalities were provided.
- Non-harvest mortality rate has remained constant over the past two years.

**Data Requests for Quota Setting** - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

- Determine what data the Committee needs and what data will need to be modeled; five or six options are probably feasible. The discussion today is preliminary for quota setting.
- The goal is to have age data available for the next meeting (definitely for the June meeting).
- Must develop various harvest scenarios rather than a specific number objective in each zone because there are too many combinations of harvest levels and because harvests likely affects populations in adjacent zones.

#### Items to Model

- Decreased population in all zones (same scenario as last year); look at zone 6 differently if the model allows.
  - Zone 6 is difficult to model because the zone is where dispersers go and so the population bounces back too quickly following harvest for the model to understand, and the population decrease is too high for the model to understand. Note; removal of animals in zone 6 does not affect the number of wolves that may be removed from zones 1 and 2.

- Continued reduction in all zones - higher harvest in all zones compared to last year.
- Relatively higher harvest rates in Zones 3 and 4; higher in Zone 6; and lower in Zones 1, 2, and 5.
- Continued population reductions in zones 3, 4, and 6. Stabilized population in zones 1, 2, and 5.
- Model a reduction in zone 5.
- Stabilize populations in zones 1 and 2, decrease in zones 3-6.
- Harvest to sustain the current population.
- Harvest to reach a minimum winter count of 350 in 2015; essentially provide a bookend or max harvest limit. A 25% or greater population reduction in one year could potentially trigger a USFWS review of the wolf program.
- Harvest to reach a minimum winter count of 510 in 2015; this is just short of a 25% overall population reduction (relatively even distribution of harvest among all zones).
- Harvest to reach a minimum winter count of 350 in 2016.
- An unlimited quota in zone 6 - talk with Jen Stenglein to determine how to translate this into the model. Discussions on the potential for unlimited quotas in zone 6 will occur at later meetings.
- A no-harvest strategy.
- Model harvest in subzone "1A."

**Hunting, Trapping and Permitting Regulations** - Discussion directed by Dave MacFarland with comments provided by Committee members.

#### Suggested Regulation Changes

- Move application deadline from August to December 10. The public does not know quota levels for the next year prior to applying with other species permits (e.g., bear application). A switch would allow more time for new trappers to take the required Trappers Education course and plan for their hunt. The WAC recommends quotas at the earliest in May, the NRB approves quotas by June (with a 30 day comment period), quotas are presented to the Voigt Taskforce with tribal declaration and subsequent state's response, and notifications are mailed to successful permit applicants by early August (earliest possible time). Essentially, this is a notification issue and not an application deadline issue. Will explore options to move drawing date earlier by 2 weeks.
- Provide more detailed zone maps.
- Integrate new gray wolf trapping Best Management Practices in new plan.
- More clearly state dates when baiting is allowed; list the open baiting period for clarity. Recommended terminology: baiting is legal from the close of the bear season (insert date) to the close of the wolf zone.
- Attacks on domestic animals: change language from "wounding and biting" to "wounding and harassing." This was discussed at previous meetings and will be implemented.
- Trapping hours: if there are no specific trapping hours for other species, this change will likely be implemented for wolf trapping.
- Develop regulations pertaining to the training of hunting hounds. These regulations are currently being reviewed by the courts. The Committee will identify items for inclusion in regulations.

#### Harvest Registration



- Wolf registration is high in early November (October 15 opening; register within 5 days after the end of the month) and coupled with other wildlife registration, the work load is high for staff. Make more staff available for registration where needed.
- Does the possibility of electronic registration for wolves exist? If CITES authority is given, harvesters will need to meet with a warden to have their pelt tagged.
- In-person registration with a game warden alleviates some public concerns with harvest.
- Wardens have identified illegal harvests by collecting harvest information in-person. Electronic registration could make illegal harvest identification difficult.
- Recommendation: try to resolve registration issues internally within department before trying to change registration system. The department can analyze registration data to determine where the most help is needed. The Committee can readdress in the future if needed.

### Zone-specific Harvest Tags

- Statewide tags:
  - Creates a shotgun-start to the season and causes zones to close quickly. A possible problem with zones closing quickly could be that the minimum population count was too low and there were more wolves available than estimated.
  - Enforcement issues exist because people can harvest a wolf in a closed zone and register it in an open zone. With zone-specific tags, if zone 2 is closed for example, a hunter cannot fill a zone 2-specific tag and register it after zone 2 closed (obvious violation).
  - Prevents the department from controlling harvest in specific zones.
  - With two years of data, closure times can be manipulated with the number of permits issued; this would require a reduction in permits.
  - Without zone-specific tags, when the quotas are very small, the risk of overshooting harvest goals increases greatly. This was observed with the closure of zone 3 in 2013.
  - Many conflicts on federal lands occurred in 2013 with hound hunters. There was a significant amount of pressure placed on zone 3 after all other zones closed.
- Zone-specific tags:
  - Zone-specific tags work well with the bear harvest.
  - When only one zone remained open in 2013, and hound hunters were forced into one zone and trespassing issues developed; some hunters are now being forced off lands they previously hunted because of the actions of other hunters who trespassed.
  - Allows the department to control closing dates and over-crowding of hunters/trappers.
  - Can extend season lengths in zones by manipulating zone-specific permits.
  - With zone-specific tags, if hounds leave a zone the hunter can no longer pursue those wolves. This is no different than for bear.
- This discussion is temporary as the goal is to continue to reduce the wolf population, and so quotas and permit levels will decrease over time.
- A compromise could be that zone 6 never closes.
- DNR Customer Services will adapt to meet needs; currently, any changes to the licensing system can be implemented for free as a new system is being developed for use in 2016. The cost to implement zone-specific tags in the next two years could be substantial, but not so if implemented for 2016.

- A move to zone-specific tags should be developed for inclusion in the management plan; however, this can be implemented at any time as was recently done with the bobcat harvest. If added to the plan, it should be written so there is some flexibility to change; although noted constraints by Customer Services in changing the licensing system must be considered.
- This topic can be placed on agenda for future discussion as to look at other data and to further consider all options. A vote should be held-off until mortality data can be reviewed.

### **Comments from the Public in Attendance**

#### First-year Volunteer Wolf Tracker

- Committee comments were eye opening for how data is used and interpreted.

#### Human Society

- The Committee meeting entirely reflected the views of the consumptive public and harvest groups. Non-consumptive views were not represented during the meeting.
- The population reduction of nearly 25% during past two years is a significant reduction.
- 362 wolves were killed as a result of humans. The estimate of illegal kills is between 9-19% which increases human-related mortality to 412. The Committee must use caution when developing harvest recommendations as these numbers indicate more wolves are being killed.
- If breeding alpha wolves are killed, the population will decrease more quickly as packs dissolve.
- The Committee should take a step back from harvest. Current mortality models are not perfect representations of mortality and don't incorporate other sources of mortality (e.g., disease).
- A private opinion survey in June, 2013, polled 625 registered voters in Wisconsin; 80% opposed trophy hunting and trophy trapping; the wolf harvest is a trophy harvest.
- Recommendation - no harvest in 2014 to ensure that the population is not going to crash.
- Continued involvement and participation at these meetings is valuable.

#### Bad River Tribe

- Direct comments will be addressed in government to government discussions.
- In February, 2013, the Bad River Tribe developed a wolf harvest zone that they would like the Committee to consider. This would be designed as a no-harvest area to protect the tribal population. This zone would not be closed to landowner permits and so it would hopefully avoid the statute that no area of the state can be closed to wolf harvest.
- Evaluate the statutory language regarding the "biting and wounding" and "harassing" of domestic animals before making changes.

### **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.
- The Committee has held votes to show the consensus, as the consensus cannot be readily determined in all situations.
- Committee votes can occur when a consensus cannot be reached. If there is a provision in the protocol that says the WAC will not hold votes, it should be removed from the protocol.

**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 broad definition that will apply to livestock and pets.**

\*\*Voted on and accepted.

**Should the process to analyze population data with the department be reopened to the public?**

\*\*Voted on and (15 yes) (1 no).

Vote Correction from Previous Meeting

**Change the regulations to allow the public to kill wolves in the act of attacking hunting hounds on public lands.**

\*\* Consensus vote is no-change to current regulation.

- Laws do not allow people to shoot other wildlife in the act of attacking dogs on public lands. The current regulation is consistent with regulations pertaining to other species.
- Scenario is unlikely and by allowing it, the possibility to abuse the regulation exists.
- Bear hunters are concerned that depredation compensation will no longer be paid for hunting hounds killed by wolves while bear hunting. This type of compensation is a statutory issue and the WAC will not make a recommendation to change this.
- DNR law enforcement currently has discretion with investigating the shooting of wolves attacking hunting hounds.
- The Committee recommended no-change to the regulation in regards to wolf attacks on pets on public lands.

**Next Meeting:** The May WAC meeting will be on Monday, May 19, 2014. For those who cannot make the meeting, members may have replacement representatives represent their group on the Committee.

**June Meeting:** The June WAC meeting will be on Thursday, June 26, 2014.

**July Meeting:** The July WAC meeting will be on Tuesday, July 22, 2014.