

WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

9/10/2014 Wausau Howard Johnson Hotel

Introductions - Deb Beyer provided a summary of committee discussion guidelines and an outline for discussion topics for the day. Discussion topics often focus on differences in opinions although commonalities exist too. We are all Wisconsin residents and outdoors persons by profession or leisure. The goal for developing a wolf management plan is to maintain a healthy and sustainable wolf population providing ecological, cultural and renewable benefits while recognizing the diverse perspectives of our citizens and addressing conflicts. Committee member introductions were made: Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Timber Wolf Alliance, Wis. Conservation Congress, Wis. Trappers Association, Wis. Cattleman's Association, Wis. Wildlife Federation, Wis. Bear Hunters Association, Safari Club Int'l, Wis. Bowhunters Association, Wis. Trappers Association, Wis. County Forest Association, USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services, U.S. Forest Service, DNR Customer Service, DNR West-central District, DNR Northern District, DNR Southern District, DNR Northeast District, DNR Law Enforcement, DNR Science Services, DNR Wildlife Damage Specialist, DNR Forest Wildlife Specialist, and DNR Large Carnivore Specialist.

Alternative Management Plan Objectives for Public Review - Discussion directed by Deb Beyer, committee facilitator, with comments provided by committee members.

Preliminary Discussion

- A draft objectives plan was provided to the committee including numeric goals and metric goals. The outline included an overall goal, framework (numeric and metric goals), objectives under consideration, and projected outcomes (population sustainability, depredation and lethal control, hunting and trapping opportunities and program funding, human interactions, and population monitoring). This is only a draft and the committee will provide input today. The draft is based on discussions that occurred at the last committee meeting. The process for presenting alternatives to the public has not been finalized but some document or summary must be presented with objectives and potential outcomes. A document such as the provided draft will be presented to provide contextual information.
- Committee recommendations will be reviewed by DNR administration; the committee acts in an advisory capacity. Following review, recommendations will be presented for public comment.
- Provide the public information on how objectives fall into the framework of carrying capacity. More ecological benefits with higher wolf numbers. Populations are more stable when managed at 70% of carrying capacity and can self-correct to changes.
- Bear hunters are concerned that dog depredations will not be compensated. The committee does not have authority to change dog depredation payments as they are established in state statute. The committee was directed by the DNR administration not to address statutory issues.
- The Wis. Trappers Association is very science oriented and has worked to develop Best Management Practices. The ecosystem is not managed by wolves and wolves do not have ecological value in the northwoods; man supplies the balance. The 350 or less goal must be maintained; cannot be 351.

- Management alternatives must have definitive questions that the public can comment on. The document should have a wide range of opinions for consideration.
- Deer are not managed for their biological carrying capacity but for their social carrying capacity; we must manage wolves for social not biological carrying capacity. There was an agreement between the DNR and sportsman in the 1980s to help fund the restoration of wolves in the state; sportsman provided \$1 million and were promised that 80 wolves would be sustainable.
- Mladenoff used a prey density model in conjunction with a habitat model. The model identified where wolves could exist, not where they currently existed. The 2008 model indicated a higher wolf population could be supported compared to the earlier study.
- The draft needs to address where wolves will exist with objectives.
- The higher the wolf population the more human-related wolf deaths will occur. A higher wolf goal means more dead wolves over time; a lower goal means less dead wolves.
- The current pending federal law suit pertaining to the delisting of wolves should be considered. The delisted status is currently under the authority of one federal judge, not the USFWS.
- Objectives should clarify that regulated harvest will occur at all population levels just at a higher or lower level.
- Demanding that wolf populations be increased is a false goal and bound for short-term failure (listed in a book on wolves). Raising the wolf population to appease wolf advocates will not help. Agreement that an unlimited goal is not good policy and the book was indicating that management is necessary for maintaining the wolf population.
- Wording for alternatives should be developed cooperatively with the committee; should include population maps and the standard population graph.
- Committee members represent people that do not share their views and they should not present themselves as being the definitive voice for their groups; they represent diverse views and not all people agree with the views being presented by their representatives.
- Difficult to discuss population goals and objectives without first discussing areas where the population will be encouraged; zones, etc. This will be discussed at future meetings.
- Multiple committee members indicated that the round robin method allowed good discussion. Committee members need to remain focused on the pertinent topics. Allow more cross-room commenting as it is difficult to counter comments after the fact; people have different expertise and should be allowed to counter discussion.
- Depredation
 - Circumstances have changed the past two years in respect to depredation. Depredation levels at past population counts cannot be used as a measure now because state and federal governments have lethal control tools which has been more effective to reduce depredation than regulated harvest.
 - Must stay above relisting threshold and reduce conflicts. A strong focus on addressing conflicts is necessary.
 - Ongoing annual problems with wolves on farms exists; both depredation and harassment. The draft objectives are missing lethal controls. It doesn't make sense to argue for a higher wolf population when problems on farms continue to persist. Concerned that a higher population will correlate to higher depredation as current problems continue.

- The draft indicates that pro-rating depredation payments may occur. Dogs were once paid for the actual value of the dogs but now they are only paid a max of \$2,500. Pro-rating payments is established in state statute.
- Depredation objectives need to be based in scientific data.
- Overwinter Minimum Count
 - The wolf population is estimated by an overwinter minimum count; 350 is an overwinter minimum count and not a population estimate. The public needs to be educated to what these numbers mean as it is a long-standing confusion point, and how it relates to viable population, carrying capacity, etc. Overwinter minimum counts have been used and are recognized by the public and these numbers are what the public opinion survey were based on. Tie the numbers to their biological meaning for the population.
 - The population data available is highly controversial; using these data as the sole measure of success will lead to conflict over time.
 - Provide the overwinter minimum count and a reliable estimate of the wolf population; the USFWS indicated that the minimum count is likely within 10% of the actual wolf population during winter. The population does increase over the summer. The DNR has current ongoing research to develop population estimation methods; the data does not exist right now. Currently evaluating the current monitoring methodology.
- Population Goal
 - Numeric population goals should be developed based on science and carrying capacity, not simply chosen randomly (350, 650, and 800). In the past the number 500 was provided as an option but it wasn't based on science. The state and federal delisting goals of 250 and 100 were developed through a scientific process and the goal of 350 is a thought out goal and provides a science-based minimum threshold.
 - In the 1990s a population viability analysis was conducted; at 200 the population had high risk of extirpation, 300 the population was stable, and 500+ was also stable. The threshold of 350 was based on the best available science at the time but it is not science-based as it was a political compromise. Large carnivores are difficult to survey and mostly surveyed according to minimum counts as the standard. Continue to use minimum count as the standard in the new plan; other states have worked on population estimates but they continue to develop minimum counts and provide those to the USFWS. The minimum count is likely towards the bottom end of a 95% CI of a population estimate.
 - Law Enforcement staff are often the first primary contacts between the public and the DNR. LE often don't hear about the favorable interactions between people and wolves but rather negative interactions. The objective of 650 is probably a little too high and 350 a little too low. Something in between would provide more flexibility in management.
 - A numeric goal does not solve controversies. At a population goal of 350 negative human-wolf interactions can still occur and a numeric goal does not address these conflicts. Threshold goals provide more flexible management.
 - Must use metrics that can be measured. The Deer Trustee Report developed by Dr. James Kroll recommended against numeric goals for both deer and carnivore management. There is not a concerted effort to reduce the bear population to the current

management plan goal and there must be consistency with other carnivores. Metric-based goals follow the recommendations of the DTR report.

- Numeric goals should have a plus/minus range associated to allow flexibility; done with other species.
- Create threshold goals that have a lower and upper threshold.
- A threshold with a higher minimum should be provided in addition to the 350 option; 650 or 850 to represent public opinions presented in the social survey.
- A large number of people expressed concerns with wolves in the public survey. The numbers of 650 and 850 were developed at the last meeting based on the public desire to maintain or increase the wolf population. Cannot ignore the public's perceived risk of wolves. Public perceptions of risks are best address through education and policy, not management, as some people fear deer as well. The public survey indicated a correlation between higher wolf abundance and higher perceived risks; education may not solve problems with wolves.
- There is a public perception that if the wolf population drops below 350 they will be relisted; this is not accurate.
- The draft indicates that the wolf population should not drop below 250 as the state listing threshold but it should indicate the federal listing threshold of 100 as well.

Development of Alternative Management Plan Objectives

- The process: The committee will develop alternatives. Alternatives will be reviewed by the DNR administration and accepted or amended. Alternatives will be presented for public comment. The committee will review public comments and other biological and social data and determine a single plan objective. The DNR administration will review the final recommendation and accept or amend it. The recommendation will be made into a Green Sheet and sent to Natural Resource Board. The NRB will review and decide to accept or reject the goal.
- The approach of presenting alternatives for public comment is only aimed at allowing the public to provide specific input on population goals and objectives based on the alternatives. The entire wolf management plan will be presented for public comment and all aspects of the plan will be open for comment.
- 350 or less
 - Wis. Bowhunters Association provided a handout to the committee regarding a population goal, population objective options, and areas where wolf populations should and should not be encouraged to persist.
 - A definitive option for 350 or less must be presented as any other option is unacceptable. There is a difference between 350 and 350 or less; 350 or less indicates that 350 is a cap and the population will be kept below this cap.
 - The public is uninformed and if offered three options, they will automatically pick the middle option. Present a 350 or less option to help the public not choose a middle option but to get them to choose a lower option other than 650. This is untrue and public decisions will be based on their opinions.
 - Four alternative goals (350, 650, 850, and a threshold goal) were presented for consideration at the last meeting; the committee discussed these options and did not reject them. The draft provided is not a proposal by any one member or

group; the draft proposal was based on the discussions of the committee. If any one member presents an option for discussion and the committee makes decisions based on the option, it is flawed to say that further decisions made by the committee regarding the issue are proposals presented by the original member.

- All committee user groups do not support any options higher than 350.
- Unlimited harvest in Zone 6 is not a statewide population goal; this is a zone-specific issue and will be discussed at future meetings.
- WBA options say that livestock depredations increased since wolves were delisted and this is inaccurate; depredations have decreased each year since. This is related to lethal controls as well as harvest; there are other factors that may have impacted depredation levels. Clarify whether any indicated increase in depredation began in 1997 or 2012.
- Do not amend the wording of user group proposals to fit the committee's wording; consider as is.
- Define "less" as 250; state threshold for listing wolves. Saying "less" is ambiguous. Provide a low threshold because if the population ever did hit the federal delisting level the federal government could reset that number; could be considerably higher than the current threshold of 100. The public should be provided a minimum so they don't think zero is viable. **The consensus is to define "less" as "250"**.
- At 350 wolves, there are still 100 packs in the state although not all may be breeding.
- 350
 - Originally, the 350 goal was established as it would allow regulated public harvest.
 - For this option 350 would be the bottom threshold.
 - Remove the word "minimum" from "350 minimum".
- 650
 - The majority of the public supported maintaining the current population in the public opinion survey; the alternative of 650 should be presented to the public.
 - Those directly affected by wolves (rural residents, farmers, ranchers) should have their opinions considered, not those living out of wolf range and in urban areas. Residents in both wolf range and non-range indicated support for maintaining the same population.
- 800
 - 800 is closest round number to the minimum count at the time of delisting (815).
 - The number can be changed to 815 or 850. **The consensus is to leave this goal listed as 800.**
- Threshold (350 minimum)
 - A question should be asked whether people support a threshold or a numeric goal. Threshold should be stated as "minimum" although the term can be defined for the public. Threshold indicates that there is significance to management and incorporates management actions. The term "threshold" could be changed to "must exceed"; stated this way in the MI management plan.
 - A threshold approach is unacceptable to some members. Whether user groups support these options or not, the committee is charged with providing options for public review. The development of options does not mean that any one group supports them.

- A threshold of 650 is different than a numeric goal of $650 \pm 10\%$; there is no cap with a threshold but if the wolf population gets to 750 with a numeric goal of 650, the population will be decreased.
- Threshold (600 minimum)
- Threshold (300-450; 300-650, 300-800)
 - Range should be larger than 300-450; this is too narrow. A range of 350 wolves would provide the department more flexibility in management; 300-650.
 - Manage for the minimum and depending on metrics (depredation levels, etc.), the population could be allowed to increase through the setting of wolf quotas.
 - Minimum of 300 with a maximum of 450. A top threshold should be included to alleviate concerns for an unlimited population.
- All suitable range occupied
 - Non-numeric goal of all suitable range occupied; similar to turkey plan. Suitable habitat is not defined in the management plan nor is there a specified numeric goal. Add “carrying capacity throughout suitable habitat” as clarifying definition. Suitable habitat is where wolves exist without causing excessive problems for people. Must define “suitable habitat” and “excessive problems”.
- Numeric goals
 - Management would try to target the population at the specific number.
 - Illogical to develop a specific numeric goal if people do not trust minimum counts.
 - Change the term “numeric” to something else to eliminate confusion; thresholds goals have associated numeric thresholds.
 - Add a plus/minus range to all numeric goals
 - Wolves exist at considerably smaller numbers than deer; a $\pm 20\%$ range is too large.
 - Proposed that the range be $\pm 10\%$ of goal.
 - Proposed that the goal should be higher; $\pm 20\%$ is more reasonable for higher goals (650, 800) but too high for the low option (350). The low end of a 20% range at a goal of 350 puts the population too close to the state delisting threshold. A 20% range allows more management options than 10%. Regardless the range, management will target the goal. If the population gets above goal, it will be managed back towards goal, and vice versa. The range incorporates a variety of variables but helps minimize concerns if within the range. For deer, the population measurement is 20% plus/minus of a numeric goal. 20% was the confidence interval of SAK.
 - ***CONSENSUS VOTE - All NUMERIC GOALS SHOULD HAVE A $\pm 10\%$ RANGE. NO MEMBER EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO THIS RANGE*.**
 - If the population dropped below the low end of the range the harvest season would not need to close but quotas would be adjusted to allow population increase. If the population got very low approaching 250, discussions on whether to issue permits for the next year would occur. State statute requires the implementation of a harvest season as long as the harvest is above state and federal delisting thresholds; 250 would halt the season by statute.
- Threshold goals

- Provide greater flexibility and manage for various other objectives other than a population number. A threshold is a lower limit that the population will not be allowed to go below; should also provide an upper limit.
- Numeric population goals are micromanagement; goals that incorporate metrics such as dog or livestock depredation work better to address these issues than managing for some set number. It is easier to manage within a range than for a numeric goal plus/minus some number. A numeric goal plus/minus a percent is difficult if the population count is plus/minus a larger number.
- The public may not support options with no cap threshold. No other state agency lists a population goal with an arbitrary cap nor is it done for other species in Wisconsin.
- Consistency with other species management
 - The bear population is more than double the current management plan goal. The population is currently managed according to various metrics. Current population goals have been discarded for other species.
 - With a threshold/range goal, wolf quotas setting would be similar to the process for bear quotas. The department will not manage for the max number of wolves that the landscape can support.
 - In statute, the minimum population threshold for establishing regulated elk harvest is 200 animals even though biologically the population could be harvested now. Items written in statute are not always written according to biological information.
 - Arguments made for reducing the wolf population are inconsistent with those made by other wildlife advisory committees to manage other species.
- The committee is charged with developing alternatives that will go forward for public review; members should not refuse to participate in this process because their groups require them to only support one option. Whether members support the objectives, the conversation is whether these are options that should be presented for consideration by the public. Proposed that because some groups are not participating in the process of developing alternatives that the decision to develop alternatives be turned over to the state.
- Add background to each alternative; biological and social carrying capacity and minimum viable population.
- Use the term “goals” because this is the term that will be used in the management plan.
- Presented options capture the viewpoints expressed in the public survey; maintain, increase, and decrease the population.
- Provide an option for 250 (lowest possible population); too many options already presented to do this.
- A social scientist will review the wording of the alternatives to minimize bias.
- Clarify that lower populations will correlate to decrease hunting and trapping opportunities.
- Public opinions provided in the public survey are going to be more accurate and representative of the state than the comments provided on alternatives; participants will likely not be a representative set of the population.
- Include both state and federal listing thresholds in draft. If the population is ever relisted the entire process is open to review by the USFWS. The USFWS has the authority to intervene and take over management authority if they believe the population is approaching threshold; i.e., the population does not need to hit threshold for the USFWS to intervene.

- To relist as a state protected species the population would have to drop below 250 for 3 years or below 80 for one year.
- The public will desire options to consider rather than having the committee make these decisions for them. The public has few opportunities to voice their opinions so multiple options should be provided; 4 alternatives is the target.

Alternative Management Plan Objectives

- Recommended that one of each alternative type is chosen.
- Recommended that the committee vote to determine whether the committee cannot reach a consensus and the department should be allowed to develop alternatives and move forward with the public comment process.
- Alternatives should be presented so they first ask the public if they prefer a numeric or threshold goal and then which alternative.
- **A VOTE OF HANDS WAS HELD TO DETERMINE WHICH ALTERNATIVES ARE PREFERRED FOR FORWARDING TO THE DNR ADMINISTRATION. MEMBERS COULD VOTE FOR MORE THAN ONE OPTION IN EACH CATEGORY.**
- Number Goals
 - 350 or less (250 minimum) according to WBA's proposal language.
 - 6 votes yes.
 - 350±10%
 - 15 votes yes. ***MOVED FORWARD FOR ADMINISTRATION REVIEW***
 - 650±10%
 - 15 votes yes. ***MOVED FORWARD FOR ADMINISTRATION REVIEW***
 - 800±10%
 - 5 votes yes.
- Continuation of current management based on statewide population goal (this represents the current and proposed wording for the 3 WBA proposals)
 - 6 votes yes.
 - Option removed as it doesn't have a specific associated goal.
- Threshold Goals
 - Must exceed 350 minimum
 - 9 votes yes. ***MOVED FORWARD FOR ADMINISTRATION REVIEW***
 - Must exceed 600 minimum
 - 2 votes yes.
 - All suitable habitat occupied by wolves
 - 0 votes yes.
- Numeric Goal Range
 - 300-450
 - 2 votes yes.
 - 300-650
 - 8 votes yes. ***MOVED FORWARD FOR ADMINISTRATION REVIEW***
 - 300-800
 - 4 votes yes.
- Unlimited harvest quota in Zone 6

- Not a population goal; discussion saved for a future meeting.
- **VOTE - SHOULD THE COMMITTEE MOVE FORWARD WITH PRESENTING THE 4 OPTIONS TO THE DNR ADMINISTRATION?**
 - ***17 VOTES YES***
 - Two of the options do not have a majority vote and this will be presented to the administration. A full report and considered options will be presented.

Summary of Issues Voted on by the Committee

- Should all numeric alternative goals have an associated range of $\pm 10\%$ of goal? ***CONSENSUS VOTE YES***
- Should the committee move forward with presenting the following 4 management goal alternatives to the DNR administration for further review? ***17 VOTES YES***
 - Numeric goal - 350 $\pm 10\%$
 - Numeric goal - 650 $\pm 10\%$
 - Threshold goal - Must exceed 350 minimum
 - Numeric goal range - 300-650

Comments from the Public in Attendance

- Comment 1 - If the carrying capacity for wolves is 1,200-1,500 wolves, it is unclear why the alternative goal for 800 was removed; this was removed to appease some members of the committee and it should be presented to the public. The recommendation for an unlimited quota in Zone 6 is ridiculous. The committee and the NRB do not have the right to block wolves from dispersing to Illinois; the people of Illinois want wolves. There are many people that do not report wolf encounters because they are concerned with how the agency will use the information.
- Comment 2 - The committee only talks about the negative aspects of wolves. The 350 goal is not a social carrying capacity. Wolves were slaughtered to extinction in Wisconsin and they recovered on their own; they were not reintroduced. There needs to be more positive discussion about wolves. Why does the wolf stakeholder committee no longer exist? Too much rhetoric used and there needs to be less of a focus on killing wolves.
- Comment 3 - Why not try to increase the wolf population in CWD affected areas to allow them to do their ecological function. Wolf management zones are too big and some packs are not harvested while others are over harvested.
- Comment 4 - The committee struggled to develop 4 alternatives in 7 hours; a list of 4 options was provided to indicate the simplicity of the task. The committee exists because there is a legislative mandate to kill wolves. It is confusing why DNR specialists and special interest groups are so dysfunctional that they cannot come to a consensus and develop 4 options. Only 6 members desire a goal of 350 or less. One committee member said that wolves do not serve an ecological function; this is amazing and unbelievable. Wolf depredations have decreased but overall depredations have not because coyotes kill livestock too and in the absence of wolves coyote will move in and kill livestock. Bears injure livestock as well but nobody talks about it. We cannot get rid of wolves or depredation so human behavior needs to be changed. Education and outreach are needed and the committee has a duty to address the concerns expressed in the public survey. The committee should not try to back away from the results of the survey it commissioned.

- Comment 5 - Addressing a letter submitted by 5 biologists to the USFWS: The letter expressed concerns for threats to wolves (the allowed use of dogs to track and trail wolves during the harvest season and the training of dogs on wolves). There are no current regulations regulating the training of hounds. I want wolves and I want bears and that is why I moved from an urban area to a rural area. The USFWS has indicated that the federal delisting level of 100 is an “old” threshold. Poaching is not the problem but rather bear baiting; bear baiting is tied to wolf mortality. There is a considerable amount of bait and hounds used each year and this is a problem that should be addressed.
- Comment 6 - The committee should not discuss group affiliations or member names in discussions; the committee is one committee and should act accordingly.
- Comment 7 - The new management plan should be based on science rather than perspectives or pleasing interest groups. As hunters we need to rise up and not use anti-wolf rhetoric as it makes us look bad to the general public. There is too much emphasis by hunters on deer and wolves; need emphasis on other wildlife as well.
- Comment 8 - Commends the committee on their work and opinions. The majority of people can support the department and their research findings. People in northern Wisconsin are the people affected by any increase in the population. At the 350 level there were concerns but people lived with and accepted them. At 650 the committee is creating a problem. Provide what you need to the public for discussion but ultimately this will be up to the NRB.
- Tom Hauge, DNR wildlife management bureau director, thanked the committee for their time and agreeing to meet again in October to finalize the plan. Acknowledged the level of difficulty in the work and commended the committee for addressing it.

Next Meetings (2): The September WAC meeting will be on Tuesday, September 30, 2014.

October Meeting: The October meeting will be on Wednesday, October 8, 2014.