

Five wolf units close as harvest moves along briskly

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Contributing Writer

Rhineland, Wis.— With great anticipation, the 2013 wolf season opened Oct. 15, and, with even greater surprise, the announcement came just six days later that Zone 2 already would be closing.

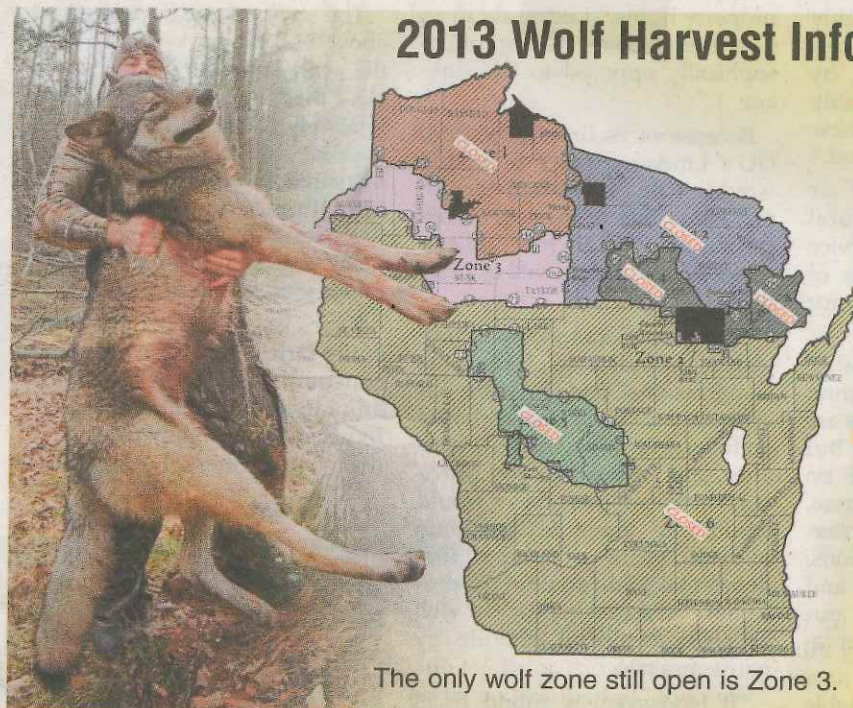
Zone 1 and Zone 5 quickly followed, closing the next week, and leaving three wolf-hunt zones closed by the end of October.

The Zone 4 closure followed shortly thereafter, as of 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 5.

The DNR then closed Zone 6 to hunting and trapping on Thursday, Nov. 7, at 2 p.m. The state wolf harvest quota for Zone 6 was set at 30 wolves, and the closure process began when 29 wolves were reported killed.

With that closure, a total of five wolf zones had been closed this season, with just Zone 3 remaining open as of Nov. 21. Any hunters or trappers who have a tag may still pursue wolves in Zone 3.

Zone 2 and Zone 5 also were the first to close last year, but not until Nov. 16. The season is scheduled to run through the end of February, but if harvest numbers continue to exceed the pace of last year, the season could again close



2013 Wolf Harvest Information

2013 Harvest (Nov. 20)

Zone	Harvest	Quota
1	77	76
2	29	28
3	29	71
4	12	12
5	33	34
6	31	30
Total	211	251

2012 Zone Closures

Zone	Date Closed
1	Dec. 2
2	Nov. 16
3	Dec. 23
4	Nov. 16
5	Dec. 12
6	Dec. 14

The only wolf zone still open is Zone 3.

early, as it did last year.

As of Nov. 30, 29 wolves had been registered in Zone 3. That zone has a quota of 71 animals.

At mid-month, it appeared unlikely the wolf season would last through the gun deer season, but harvest rates in Zone 3 have been much lower than in the other five zones.

Zone 3 was the last to close in 2012, on Dec. 23.

A total of 1,844 resident and 11 nonresident wolf licenses were sold through Nov. 20, which will surely surpass the \$289,865.50 in revenue the wolf season produced last year.

Trapping dominated the harvest method so far this year, with more

than 70 percent of wolves being caught in foot-hold traps in the initial harvest report through Nov. 20. Last year, 44 percent of wolves were trapped through the first week, with 52 percent trapped during the entire season. Only two of the wolves harvested were radio-collared.

The quick closure of five zones this season has led to speculation

that perhaps the population is even higher than the 809 to 834 over-winter minimum count. Last year's quota of 116 wolves didn't make a dent in the wolf population, so the quota was more than doubled to 251 wolves this year.

Part of the confusion in setting quotas and issuing tags is that a certain portion of the quota is set aside for Chippewa tribal use, but tribal leadership has not allowed its members to make use of the tribal tags. Tribal members who want a wolf tag have been applying for state-issued licenses. In 2012, 85 wolves were set aside for tribal members in the ceded territory. The quota for state-licensed hunters and trappers last year was 116 wolves, for a total quota of 201.

This year, some of the quota that would have been considered for the tribes was shifted to state-licensed hunters and trappers.

Kurt Thiede, the DNR land division administrator, issued the following statement in response to the quick closure.

"There could be a variety of factors contributing to this higher rate of harvest," Thiede said. "Given that this is only our second year of wolf hunting and trapping in the state, it is difficult to say whether this year is an anomaly or whether this could become the norm moving forward."

The DNR Wolf Advisory Committee tackled the question at its Nov. 19 meeting in Wausau as members discussed the 2013 season and prepared to outline goals for the 2014 wolf season.

"Our ultimate goal is to harvest 251 wolves, distributed across the landscape," said David MacFarland, DNR large carnivore specialist. "The harvest zones are a tool by which we attempt to direct the harvest to achieve desired outcomes. The quotas concentrate hunting pressure more in areas with higher potential for conflicts, allowing for higher population densities in core habitat where potential for conflict is lower. This is our second season, and we continue to learn information about harvest success that will be valuable in future management decisions."

Through Monday, Nov. 18, 212 wolves had been registered. Totals included 78 wolves in Zone 1 (76 quota), 29 in Zone 2 (28), 29 in Zone 3 (71), 12 in Zone 4 (12), 33 in Zone 5 (34), and 31 in Zone 6 (30).

An additional wolf has been added to the Zone 1 total due to a wolf reported as harvested in Zone 3 that an investigation revealed had been harvested in Zone 1. Enforcement action was taken in that case.

Of the 212 wolves, 109 were males and 103 were females. Trappers reported capturing 173 wolves, 38 were shot by gun hunters, and one archery kill was reported in Taylor County on Nov. 9.

By the time the season ends, Price County likely will be the state leader. Price County has seen 20 wolves tagged, and nearly half of the county is in Zone 3. Douglas County was on top as of Nov. 18 with 22 wolves, but has only a sliver of its southwest corner in Zone 3. Other county totals include: Bayfield, 18; Lincoln, 12; Iron, Jackson, and Sawyer, 11; Oneida, 10; Adams, eight; Ashland, Marquette, Shawano, and Washburn, seven; Langlade, six; Clark, Rusk, Taylor, and Wood, five; Burnett, Columbia, Juneau, and Monroe, four; Florence, Forest, and Polk, three; Barron, Eau Claire, Marinette, and Oconto, two; and Marathon and Vilas, one.