

Number of dogs killed by wolves in '13 matches state record

By Jim Servi

Contributing Writer

Rhineland, Wis. — Many people, including outdoorsmen, don't truly understand the impact wolves have on the environment unless it directly affects them. This is certainly not the case for owners of the 23 dogs that were killed by wolves so far this year.

The last time this many dogs were killed was 2006, compared with only seven confirmed kills last year. More than 200 dogs have been killed by wolves since 1985.

The Wisconsin DNR has con-

tracted the USDA Wildlife Services to investigate wolf kills, or depredations, and resolve wolf conflicts since 1990. Wildlife Services investigates all complaints that have sufficient evidence to warrant an investigation. The complaints range from livestock to household pets. Over the years, this has included cattle, deer, sheep, horses, llamas, pigs, goats, chickens, turkeys, and dogs of a variety of breeds, from beagles to St. Bernards. Most of the dogs killed by wolves have been trailing hounds.

Dave Ruid, of Rhineland, assistant district supervisor for the USDA Wildlife Services, has found "that nearly all hound depredations by wolves come from hound bear training and hunting due to their close proximity and the territorial nature of wolves."

"We see very few depredations on hounds that are hunting rabbits, coyotes, or bobcats — usually only one or two per year if that," Ruid said.

"During the bear hound training and hunting seasons, there are

likely thousands of wolf/hound interactions if you include auditory contact," Ruid said.

When asked about what causes wolves to attack hounds, Ruid said, "We don't completely understand all of the variables, but some of them likely include hunting dog proximity to a wolf rendezvous site, cohesiveness of the hunting dog pack, number of adult and subordinate wolves in a pack, and previous exposure of wolves to hunting dogs."

Since 2001, wolves have killed on average 14 hounds per year.

With the payouts for 23 dogs at an average of more than \$2,000 per dog, it is possible that payouts will top last year's total (all wolf damage, not just for dogs) of \$139,174 and the 10-year average of more than \$130,000.

The DNR website shows damage payouts on its wolf management page, but it's important to note that the payouts don't necessarily line up with the year that the damage occurred. In general, the payout will occur the year following the damage.