

Wolves

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there would be a "10 to 15 percent growth rate," similar to the growth rate experienced during the past year.

Some meeting participants suggested that MacFarland's statement proved that a wolf harvest of 154 animals has little overall effect on the population, and a greater harvest would be needed to obtain a population goal of 350 wolves, which is dictated in the DNR's current wolf-management plan.

Part of the confusion lies with the fact that a minimum count is used instead of a population estimate. The minimum count doesn't represent the number of wolves that are actually in the state during the fall hunting months. Estimates are that the number of wolves in Wisconsin can be two to three times the minimum count when pups arrive in the spring.

The harvest in Zone 6 last year demonstrates that difference after reporting a harvest rate of 128.6 percent of the minimum count – more animals were harvested by sportsmen than the DNR's minimum count showed were in the entire zone.

MacFarland also updated the group on actions that have been taken in response to the Dec. 19, 2014 federal delisting of Great Lakes wolves to the endangered species list. There currently are two different actions that could possibly overturn that ruling.

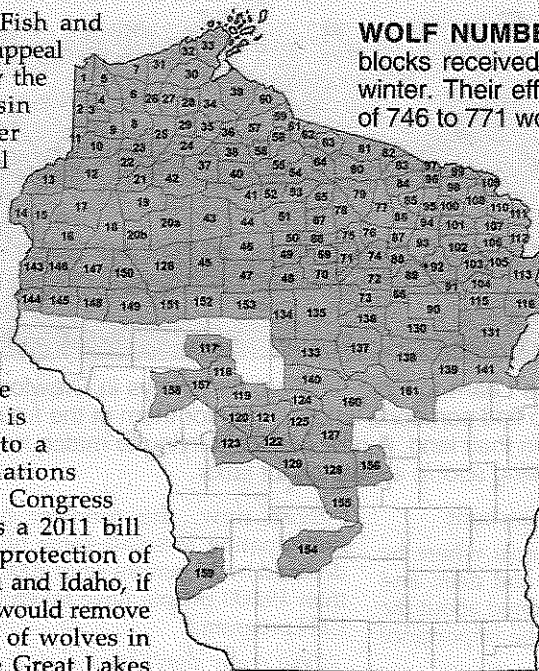
First is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's appeal that was joined by the state of Wisconsin and several other states. That appeal currently is in a litigation process that is expected to run throughout the summer.

The second option – and likely to see quicker action – is a rider attached to a federal appropriations bill introduced to Congress on June 9. Just as a 2011 bill removed federal protection of wolves in Montana and Idaho, if approved, this bill would remove federal protection of wolves in Wyoming and the Great Lakes region, returning management to the states.

In the meantime, progress to update the 1999 wolf plan "is on hold until state management is returned to Wisconsin," according to Kurt Thiede, newly appointed DNR deputy secretary. For trappers and hunters, there will be no applications this year, at least at this point, but all preference points will remain while the clock stops on the 3-year period to either apply or lose preference points. If one

WOLF NUMBERS. These timber wolf survey blocks received attention from trackers this past winter. Their efforts resulted in a minimum count of 746 to 771 wolves.

Map courtesy of the Wisconsin DNR



Four packs were discovered, including three wolves in the Elk River pack, five wolves in the Mustard Creek pack, two to three in the Clifford pack, and four in the Thunder Creek pack. Anyone interested in other units and packs will be able to find a summary online.

Tracking efforts are made up of a combination of trained volunteer trackers and DNR trackers. MacFarland said they also are evaluating current monitoring. He explained that current methods are "the best methods available, but expensive – costing over a quarter million (dollars) per year." Wildlife professionals will be exploring new methodologies during the next five years in Wisconsin's Central Forest Region. They're also introducing a program in which volunteers will monitor cameras throughout the state to provide data on wildlife populations, in addition to switching VHF collars to GPS collars to decrease the cost and increase data-gathering capabilities.

The over-winter minimum

count was 815 at the time of delisting on Jan. 27, 2012 and 660 to 689 last year. At the height of the count during the winter of 2011-12, wolf complaints and cattle losses had reached their highest levels. There were 223 complaints and 70 cattle killed that year, with 71 cattle killed the next year. A harvest season was enacted the fall of 2012. Lethal options for wildlife officials returned, resulting in a decrease in complaints and losses during the following three years.

Ralph Fritsch, of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, asked, "Looking at the data presented, is it a correct assumption that when the state has management authority, that depredation numbers are lower?"

Brad Koele, DNR wildlife damage specialist, said yes, citing the lethal options to counter problem wolves that were available the past three years.

Another concern with the depredation program that was brought forward was funding. Since relisting, payments have reverted back to the endangered resources fund, potentially taking away funding from endangered species that may need it more. When wolves were under state management the past three years, depredation payments came from license revenues.

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State wolf numbers continue to climb

By Jim Servi
Contributing Writer

Wausau, Wis. — Desperate for information on the status of the Wisconsin wolf population, a half-dozen news cameras and nearly 40 people packed the conference room in Wausau for the wolf population update. What they discovered was that the minimum count grew to 746 to 771 wolves during the winter of 2014-15 compared with a minimum count of 660 to 689 for the previous year.

Broken down by zone, the minimum counts were as follows: Zone 1 – 309 to 319; Zone 2 – 161 to 166; Zone 3 – 82 to 86; Zone 4 – 31 to 32; Zone 5 – 129 to 134; and Zone 6 – 34.

The minimum count grew despite the fact that 223 wolves were killed last year, including a harvest of 154 wolves during last fall's hunting and trapping season, 14 from vehicle collisions, and 33 from depredation control.

When asked what the population models show if there is no wolf harvest season this fall, Dave MacFarland, the DNR's large-carnivore specialist, said

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