

Dog training takes center stage at wolf committee meeting

By Jim Servi

Contributing Writer

Wausau, Wis. — A new facilitator, Deb Beyer, was introduced at the July DNR wolf committee meeting after concerns about possible bias were raised regarding having Dave MacFarland, the DNR's large carnivore specialist, leading the committee.

Despite having a new person leading the meeting, it was the recent court ruling that upheld the training of trailing hounds on wolves, and the ensuing recommendations, that was the talk of the committee.

Beyer has worked for UW-Extension out of Sheboygan as a natural resources educator for the past 12 years, and she is trained at meeting facilitation.

Beyer said she hopes to "ensure that all members of the committee get a chance to voice their opinion in a respectful manner and work together to achieve cooperation on this important topic."

In a decision that captured nationwide attention, a Wisconsin appeals court recently lifted an injunction that now makes dog training for wolf hunting legal in Wisconsin. As with most aspects of the wolf season, there is little the committee can recommend since most of the season framework is already set in law via state statute. However, two areas where committee members believed they could provide input were the date ranges to allow training of

hounds on wolves, and whether the training period will remain open after a zone's quota is reached.

Committee members expressed their views, with the majority supporting the idea of having the dog-training season open immediately following the nine-day gun deer season and close at the end of February, thus making it run concurrent with the hound hunting season for wolves. They also elected to have the zones remain open to training regardless of if the zone is still open for wolf hunting and trapping. These recommendations will be brought to the Natural Resources Board for approval.

In the meantime, the hound-training season is open right now,

under existing rules of the state's "leash law." Those leash law rules would only change if the committee makes different recommendations that are adopted by the NRB. Until then, houndsmen may trail wolves in a "catch-and-release" fashion under leash law rules.

In addition to discussion on the dog-training season, the committee discussed a proposal for voluntary carcass registration of wolves killed with the use of dogs. The goal is to evaluate any injuries that may have occurred to the wolf and determine the likely causes. Protectionist groups have accused houndmen of allowing their dogs to fight with wolves. This would be one way in which the DNR could attempt to determine whether any wolf/dog fights are taking place during pursuit.

After looking at 28 of the 35 wolves that were harvested with the use of dogs last year, DNR personnel were only able to gather information from one carcass that had not been skinned before it was turned in. Having the hide still on the carcass would make it easier for the DNR to gather this type of information.

Because of this new interest, the committee's proposal would ask that wolf carcasses, for those animals harvested with the use of dogs, be registered within five days of harvest with the pelt on. The pelt would then be removed in the presence of a DNR conservation warden, who would be trained to collect evidence by DNR wildlife health staff members.

Right now, voluntary registration is proposed, which some

committee members pointed out has obvious drawbacks — one of those being that if a hound gets in a scrape with a wolf, it is unlikely the hunter would voluntarily bring in that carcass.

In other news, Jason Suckow, the USDA Wildlife Services state director for Wisconsin, said, "The number of complaints from wolves is way down, and depredations are lower this year."

Suckow pointed out that after severe winters there often are fewer wolf attacks on livestock and pets because wildlife, especially deer, succumb to the conditions, making them easy prey for wolves.

"After delisting, we now have more tools to employ during depredation and have removed close to 150 wolves over the last two years from traditional hot spots," he added.

The wolf season also did its part to decrease livestock losses to wolves, with hunters and trappers harvesting 14 wolves from seven packs blamed for dog kills in recent years.

So far this year, six dogs have been confirmed as losses to wolves. Two dogs killed in July were hounds being used to pursue bears during the training season in Iron and Jackson counties. In June, a Labrador retriever was killed in Bayfield County by wolves. Earlier this year, two hounds and a beagle were killed in Bayfield, Price, and Clark counties.

Last year, 28 dogs were killed by wolves, including four dogs that were not hounds (two German shorthairs, a St. Bernard, and a rat terrier).