

By Jim Servi
Contributing Writer

Madison — The 2014 wolf season will close when the harvest hits the DNR's quota of 150 animals, even though there was quota that remained in zones 3 and 6. Zone 6 was to have closed Dec. 5.

"We've been keeping an eye on the 150 statewide number for closure of the wolf season," said Kurt Thiede, DNR Land Division administrator. "That is the number set by the (Natural Resources) board for the state that we'll be looking at and not the quotas within the two remaining zones."

As of Dec. 4, there had been 149 wolves registered. Closure notification was expected to be issued by the DNR after one more wolf was harvested from Zone 3.

If the zone-specific quotas were allowed to be reached in zones 3 and 6, there would be a statewide harvest of 163 wolves, because quotas had been exceeded in zones 1 and 2 with how quickly wolves were caught by trappers when the season opened.

There already has been discussion about how to change the pace of harvest to avoid a similar dilemma in future years. To that point, Thiede said, "We're still in the early stages of wolf seasons here in Wisconsin where we've seen different paces (of zone closures), and we're trying to learn and adapt."

Zones 3 and 6 were the only zones that were still open as of Dec. 3. A day later, with harvests in Zone 6, the DNR called for that zone to close Dec. 5. As with past years, the number of wolves registered during the gun deer season was low. From Nov. 18 through Dec. 3 only five wolves were registered, opening up an opportunity — albeit slim — for hunters to pursue wolves with hounds. Hounds may be used after the gun deer season — Dec. 1 this year. Last year, hound hunters had suc-

cess in Zone 3, harvesting 35 wolves with the use of hounds. Zone 3 was the final zone to close last season — Dec. 23.

The harvest, by zone, as of Dec. 4 stood at: Zone 1, 36 wolves (quota 32); Zone 2, 15 (quota 29); Zone 3, 29 (quota 40); Zone 4, 5 (quota 8); Zone 5, 18 (quota 20); and Zone 6, 32 (quota 35).

As Mike Brust, Wisconsin Bowhunters Association president, can attest, it's not simply as easy as finding a wolf pack and tagging a wolf. Brust located a wolf pack in Marathon County, but has been unable to pin them

down in the large tract of land that they run. Hunters and trappers in Taylor County echoed similar sentiments regarding their pursuit of wolves during gun deer season.

New wolf plan

The DNR is in the process of updating its timber wolf management plan. The department expects to release a draft of that plan sometime in late December or, more likely, early January.

That release will be followed by public hearings that are expected to take place in late January, but no dates, times, or locations had been pinned down as of Dec. 4.

Where the DNR comes down on a wolf goal seems to be the topic of most interest to wolf program watchers. The current plan calls for 350 wolves statewide. Some members of the DNR wolf advisory committee are calling for a much higher goal. As the wolf program grew in the 1980s, Dick Thiel, then the DNR's wolf program leader, said the state would carry 80 to 100 wolves.

According to Dave MacFarland, DNR large canine biologist, it appears the DNR wolf advisory committee will be on a hiatus until February, when the group will be able to review the input provided

from January public hearings. More public hearing information is expected after the Dec. 10 NRB meeting. Based on the results of the public hearings and input from a separate stakeholders meeting (that will not include DNR wolf advisory committee members), the wolf advisory committee will resume in February to put the final touches on the wolf plan.

From there, the plan is expected to be reviewed by NRB members at their April board meeting, with expectations that any changes will take effect during the 2015-16 wolf season.

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Wisconsin wolf season to close

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when harvest hits 150